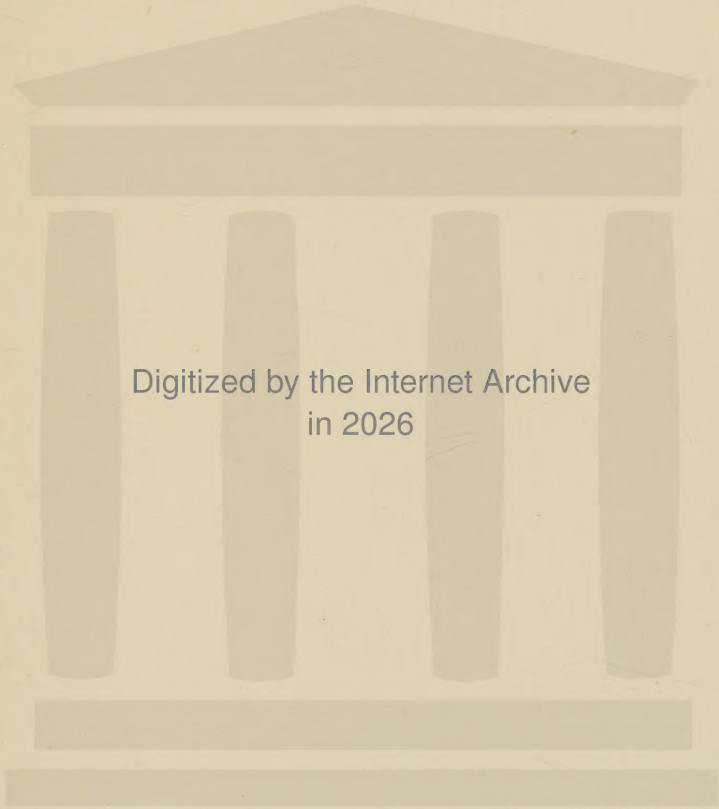
REMY DE GOURMONT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REMY DE GOURMONT

Remy de Gourmont

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"Let us not allow the tradition of free minds to perish."
REMY DE GOURMONT

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MEDIAEVAL LATIN

[LE LATIN MYSTIQUE]

1895

I AM to discuss the Latin language and Latin poetry, a certain Latin language which goes from the fifth to the thirteenth century and beyond, from St. Augustine to Thomas à Kempis, from the *Confessions* to the *Imitation*. It goes back almost to the end of the third century and only closes with Erasmus, a total of one thousand years of poetry and rhetoric. It is unknown and above all it is despised. While Calpurnius, a painful imitator of Virgil, benefits by his date which is not far removed from the first century, an authentic great poet, Adam de Saint-Victor, remains totally unknown because he wrote the Latin of the age of Louis VII. It is a point of view I have never been able to accept, but I can understand and explain it. Latinists have the conviction, an

inheritance from religious dogmatism, that there is an orthodoxy of the Latin language and that it is represented in poetry by Virgil, in prose by Cicero, that after those two authors, though men had still a claim to write in Latin, they could not claim to write it well; and they go through periods and vocabulary, blaming everything which is not Virgilian or Ciceronian, while, if they were logically true to their critical conceptions as applied to French language and literature, they ought to prove that in the succession of epochs a Latin author writes better, shows more originality of thought and style when he borrows less from his predecessors, when he remains in communion with the spirit of his age. But there is a prejudice about Latinity. This can be explained. When it became a matter of school teaching, strict rules had to be found, and on what could they be based except on the period of the greatest genius and of the most strictly Roman style? If we had been so unfortunate as to surround the French language with a like naïve solicitude, if, as was attempted, we had made an imperative model of any literary epoch, such as the very beautiful and admirable age of Louis XIV, no doubt a writer of our time (which also has its merits) would only be esteemed to the extent that his style resembled, like a cento, like a parody, the manner of Bossuet or of Racine. The results of this critical method would have been that almost all the writers of the nineteenth century, with Victor Hugo and Michelet at their head, would have been considered as tasteless eccentrics, in a word, as barbarians.

Viennet, Augier, Ponsard and M. Pessonneaux, the translator of Virgil, alone would escape censure. But, it will be said the case is not the same. After the constitution of the barbaric kingdoms and the disappearance of the imperial power in Gaul, Latin was slowly transformed into the language it became, French, which was formed in the eleventh century and even earlier. It is therefore impossible for any Latin writer to be produced at that time without his being factitious, since his language is not that of the people. This objection, whose arguments could easily be enlarged, might have carried conviction some years ago. It is no longer very solid, since we know there is not and perhaps never was an identity between the popular language and the literary language. However, and this is part of the interest of French literature in the middle ages, at that possibly unique moment the two languages were confounded to a certain extent, but not sufficient to exclude a learned and perfectly legitimate form of expression, Latin, beside the popular form of expression. In hardly any modern literature is there a coincidence between the written language and the spoken language. This is accepted for modern literary Italian, which did not exist even in the time of Stendhal, but let us look at the divergence in our own language. Where is the language of academic discourses spoken? It is spoken very little. It is employed, it is an oratorical language; it is also written in eloquent and banal works, for it is easy to handle, abounding much in general ideas, that is to say common-

places, in which the French excel. When it is spoken, it is on rare occasions, on solemn visits, in official relations which have witnesses. I do not think anyone in the French parliament ever thought of conversing familiarly with a colleague in the ordinary tone of speech. Besides that, there is the literary language of such infinite variety that it may become the individual expression of a temperament, and in that case it almost becomes hermetic and is not enjoyed or even wholly understood by more than two or three thousand persons, among whom is a large number of foreigners whose education makes them less aware of shades of speech. Besides the language of oratory and the literary language (of which poetry may give a general example), there is the language rapidly written for newspapers, the stage and popular novels. At first sight that appears the general language of Frenchmen, and in fact it is the language spoken in the middle classes and understood even by those who do not use it. It must not be confounded with the language of literary expression. Owing to its vulgarity it is the very opposite, and he who uses it as an ordinary instrument yet raises it several degrees if he tries to adapt it to some work more elevated than his ordinary occupation. And then, besides these different languages which are chiefly written, there are a much greater number which are hardly ever written and are only used for conversation. Hence there are two large classes of language which, even in the most apparently unified nation, are almost totally irreducible to one an-

other. In the cases where they approach the most, they are separated by pronunciation. There is an abyss between even the most familiar way of reading and even the most pompous manner of speaking. Besides the pronunciation of words common to the two dialects, almost everything differs; syntax, vocabulary, tone. And the further we depart from the distinguished classes, either towards the low classes, or towards the eccentric classes, these differences are accentuated to antinomy, that is to say, slang. Listen to the two salesmen who have spent the whole day conversing in conventional or middle language with fashionable women to whom they sell clothes; hear them speak to each other of their love affairs and their pleasures. It is quite a different language and if the fashionable women had understood it they would have been scandalised, for modesty shows itself especially in the domain of language, which is that of propriety. Lengthy disquisitions would be necessary merely to indicate all the shades of language as it is practised in Paris, where it marks out almost as many castes as are recognised in India. But without going into details, we may at least assert that there is at present in France a profound difference between the spoken and written language. Which is the first of these two? Since these questions are never submitted to anyone but the educated, they do not hesitate to reply that it is the written language and that there is no other worthy of the name of French. From the point of view of philology freed from literary prejudices, the primordial lan-

guage is on the contrary the spoken language, which far from being a degeneration of the written language is its reservoir and fountain of youth; and if it is true to say that there is no literary language where there is no language of conversation, it will suffice to show that the existence of Latin was prolonged very far into the middle ages, in order to show also the legitimacy and possible originality of a Latin literature contemporary with old French literature.

Nobody denies that Latin was spoken in France in the cloisters and schools until the fifteenth century and perhaps later; it is also a well-known fact that even much later, even down to the middle of the nineteenth century, Latin was the international language of a large part of central Europe. In Austria, for example, in the time of Maria Theresa the politics of the interior were carried out in Latin; and the first debates of its parliament, the mirror of so many races, took place in Latin. Until nearly our own epoch, the servants there spoke Latin, the only way for them to pass from one family to another in a country divided linguistically almost to infinity. But there is no need to come down so far. There can be no doubt that there was a Latin public in Europe in the time of Erasmus; this is abundantly proved by the success of his *Colloquia*, twenty-five thousand copies of which were sold in Paris alone in a few months. Not only every ecclesiastic, but every pupil, every student, every one connected with the law, with the University, read and spoke Latin, as is still

proved by the jests and songs their wit has transmitted to us. When a man wished to be understood by what is still called "the élite" he chose Latin; Descartes did so and Spinoza; to disseminate the *Provinciales* abroad, they were put into Latin; French was chiefly addressed to women, and it may be said in this sense that they had an enormous influence on the development of poetry and the whole of French literature. From Erasmus let us go straight back to the twelfth century which gives us the most popular example of the use of Latin in the details of domestic life. It was in Latin that as mistress, wife and nun, Héloïse loved Abélard, and it is in Latin that she has left her testimony. Thus from age to age we could go back to the time when French was only an uncertain deformation of Latin, and we should always find, if only in the monasteries, a population for whom Latin had been the language of education and for whom the language of the people was merely an obscure dialect. This population, which was sometimes smaller and sometimes larger according to the chance of the age, had at least the advantage of being international, whether it was the direct heir of spoken Latin or whether it came from the minor Irish and Carolingian renaissances. There were no frontiers for it. The Latinizer, who was almost always a monk, if he travelled or went on pilgrimage, started from a Latin country and always arrived in a Latin country. If he was a poet, and they were innumerable, he found at Saint-Gall or at Monte Cassino the reputation he enjoyed at the abbey of Jumiéges.

Far from being immured in the petty interests of town and family, the petty necessities of dialect, the Latin writer of the eleventh century mingled with the psychology of all Europe. He did not write for a small group but for a vast world, and upon the whole the progressive effacement of his literature was the triumph of particularism. It is certain that its great defect is the lack of accent, and that its lack of a fatherland turns it too uniformly towards the exposition of dogmatic truths. Extended in space, it is limited in time and carries with it the certainty of its decadence, but, I repeat, its temporary existence was legitimate; it was also inevitable. And then, which dominates everything, it is a fact. After the death of paganism although Latin literature became almost exclusively ecclesiastical it remained a literature varied in its form, vitalised by a constant accretion of originalities, sufficiently renewed from time to time by verbal invention to excite still the interest of scholars.

Verbal invention is perhaps what is most often denied it, and yet those who have studied it, even superficially, can perfectly well distinguish the styles of different men and different epochs. Starting from the influence of the Bible and Horace, the poetry of Saint Ambrose evolved slowly towards the syllabic and rhymed form to which Adam de Saint-Victor and Thomas Aquinas gave an almost absolute perfection which, like all perfections was the sign of approaching death. Classic Latin poetry died of Virgilian perfection; classic French poetry of Racine's

perfection. This is almost the one certain law of literary evolution. Ecclesiastical classic poetry did not escape it, a new proof of its essential conformity with vulgar poetry (in the Italian sense of the word); it died because it could not renew either its ideas or its language, and its last sighs are the *Dies Irae* and the *Stabat Mater*, about a century after Adam de Saint-Victor. And a little later ecclesiastical Latin prose produced its supreme flowering in the *Imitation*.

From whatever point of view I look at it, I cannot admit the legitimacy of the contempt thrown on this unknown literature, with which I only sympathise historically. Is it despised because it contains a great deal of rubbish? But remember that it has almost all been preserved and that its mass, for a period not much longer, is twenty-five to thirty times greater than what we have left of classic literature. Nobody has read it all, which would need a lifetime and more patience than has been granted to me; but I have turned over almost all the poets and saw that the proportion of mediocrity was not greater than in the corresponding French literature, though outstanding geniuses are much rarer. But five or six poets could be taken from it who would astound at least the Latinists. I am much more reserved about the prose-writers, whom I know less, and who were chiefly theologians or sermon-writers or philosophers, whose philosophy concerns M. Picavet.

Desiré Nisard said of Erasmus: "He wrote admirable things in a dead language." That was beginning to be

true certainly in the age when Erasmus and Luther flourished, but we have seen that this dead language still had a living public such as few writers *in vulgari eloquio* have. Let us not judge those times which will always be obscure to us, with the sentiment of our own. Long after Latin was supposed to be dead, it remained the vigorous plant whose roots spread out everywhere, and if its branches little by little lost their height some were still fine enough to attract the attention of men. Arnaud de Villeneuve said at the end of the thirteenth century, in the style of an alchemist, what practically precedes Harvey's *Omne vivum ex ovo* and the theories of Pasteur: "The elements can only be engendered by their own seed." The Bible, which is the foundation of the Latin poetry of the middle ages, could not engender a very varied literary expression, especially as the tales it contains were only read as examples of divine morality; but we can see in it a satirical vein which is almost popular, and almost as much as in the profane and parallel literature the defects, freaks and vices of men and women, especially women, are its inexhaustible theme. Woman was apparently the aversion of the monks, while the secular clergy accused the monks of an indiscreet use of the theme. There are two currents in this literature, the ecclesiastic and the monastic, from which come reciprocal and sometimes diverting satires. On this side, and also on the political side which the Church never abandoned, the Latin of the middle ages was in contact with exterior life and more closely attached to it than is sup-

posed. Pushing on in that direction we soon come upon the Goliards, those free, wandering, irreverent and licentious clerks whose Latin songs and complaints are all pagan or sacrilegious, and we see that Church Latin has been used for everything, to amuse merry company or to write the life of Mohammed as well as to celebrate the praises of the Lord.

Translator's Note: This preface was written much later than 1895, but is given under that date to show Gourmont's earlier literary tastes.

THE BOOK OF MASKS

[LE LIVRE DES MASQUES]

1896

IT is difficult to characterize a literary evolution at a time when the fruits are still uncertain, when the blossoming even is not over in the whole orchard. There are precocious trees, tardy trees, doubtful trees which one would not like to call sterile yet. The orchard is very varied, very rich, too rich; the density of leaves causes shade, and shade makes the flowers pale and fruits green.

We shall wander in this opulent and shady orchard, sitting down for a moment at the foot of the strongest, the most beautiful or the most agreeable trees.

When they deserve it from their importance, their necessity, their congruity, literary evolutions receive a name; very often this name has no precise significance, but it is useful. It serves as a rallying-point to those who receive

it and as a target to those who give it; thus there is a fight around a purely verbal *labarum*. What is meant by romanticism? It is easier to feel it than to explain it. What is meant by symbolism? Almost nothing, if we keep to its narrow and etymological meaning; if we go beyond, it can mean individualism in literature, freedom of art, abandonment of the formulas taught, tendencies towards what is new, strange and even queer; it may also mean idealism, disdain for the social anecdote, anti-Naturalism, the tendency to take from life only the characteristic detail, to pay attention only to the act by which one man is distinguished from another, to wish to achieve only results, the essential; finally for poets symbolism seems bound to free verse, that is to say verse freed from its swaddling-clothes, verse whose young body can disport at its ease, away from bonds and clothes.

All this has very little in common with the syllables of the word, for we must not allow the insinuation that symbolism is only a transformation of the old allegorization or art of personifying an idea in a human being, a landscape or a narrative. Such an art is the whole of art, primordial and eternal art, and a literature delivered from this concern would be indescribable; it would be nothing, its aesthetic significance would be adequate to the cluckings of the curassow or the brayings of the wild ass.

Literature indeed is nothing but the artistic development of ideas, the symbolising of ideas by means of imaginary heroes. Heroes or men (for every man is a hero in his

sphere) are only outlined by life; it is art which completes them by giving them in exchange for their poor sick souls the treasure of an immortal idea; and the humblest may be called to this participation if he is chosen by a great poet. How humble was that Aeneas whom Virgil loaded with all the burden of being the idea of Roman force, and how humble was Don Quixote upon whom Cervantes imposed the terrible weight of being at once Roland and the four sons of Aymon, Amadis, Palmerin, Tristan and all the Knights of the Round Table! The history of symbolism would be the history of man himself, since man can only assimilate an idea when it is symbolised. I must not insist, for we might think that the young devotees of symbolism were ignorant of the *Vita Nuova* and of Beatrice, whose frail and pure shoulders yet remain upright under the complex weight of symbols which the poet lays on her.

Whence came the illusion that the symbolising of ideas was a novelty?

It was thus. In recent years we had a very serious attempt at literature based on contempt for ideas and disdain for symbols. The theory, which sounds culinary, is well known: Take a slice of life, etc. M. Zola, having invented this recipe, forgot to make use of it. His "slices of life" are heavy poems of a muddy and tumultuous lyricism, popular romanticism, democratic symbolism, but always filled with an idea, always big with an allegorical significance, *Germinal, The Mine, The Crowd, The Strike.* The idealistic revolt is not against the works (ex-

cept against the base works) of Naturalism, but against its theory or rather against its pretentions. By reverting to the earlier, the eternal necessities of art, those in revolt thought they were asserting new and even surprising truths by professing their determination to bring back ideas into literature; they were only re-lighting the torch; at the same time they lighted all round it a number of little candles.

There is, however, one new truth which has recently entered literature and art; it is a metaphysical truth and apparently quite *a priori,* quite young, since it is only a century old, and really neew since it had not yet been used in the aesthetic order. This evangelic, marvellous, liberating and renovating truth is the principle of the ideality of the world. With respect to man, the thinking subject, the world, all that is exterior to the ego, only exists according to the idea he has of it. We know nothing but phenomena, we only reason about appearances; every truth in itself eludes us; the essence is unassailable. Schopenhauer popularised this under the clear and simple formula: The world is my representation. I do not see what is; what is, is what I see. So many thinking men, so many and perhaps different worlds. This doctrine, which Kant left on the way to go to the assistance of shipwrecked morality, is so beautiful and so supple that it can be transposed without harming free logic from theory to even the most exacting practice, a universal principle of emancipation for every man capable of understanding it. Aes-

thetics is not the only thing it has revolutionized, but here we are only discussing aesthetics.

In manuals they still give a definition of the beautiful; they go further; they give formulas by which an artist may attain the expression of the beautiful. There are institutions where they teach these formulas, which are only the mean and summary of former ideas or appreciations. Since aesthetic theories are generally obscure they add to them the example, the ideal pattern, the model to follow. In these institutions (and the civilised world is only one vast institution) every novelty is considered blasphemous, and every personal affirmation becomes an act of madness. Max Nordau, who read with fantastic patience the whole of contemporary literature, propagated an idea wickedly destructive of all intellectual individualism, i. e., that "nonconformity" is the capital crime for a writer. Our opinion is violently different. The capital crime for a writer is conformity, imitation, submission to rules and teachings. The work of a writer should not only be the reflection but the magnified reflection of his personality. The only excuse a man has to write is to write himself, to reveal to others the sort of world which is reflected in his individual mirror; his one excuse is to be original; he must say things not yet said and say them in a form not yet formulated. He must create his own aesthetic—and we must admit as many aesthetics as there are original minds and judge them according to what they are and not according to what they are not.

Let us admit then that symbolism is the expression even if excessive, untimely, and pretentious, of individualism in art.

This over-simple but clear definition will suffice us for the time being. In the course of the following portraits, or later, we shall no doubt have occasion to complete it; its principle will still serve to guide us by urging us to seek not what the new writers ought to do according to terrible rules and tyrannical traditions, but what they have tried to do. Aesthetics have now become a personal talent; no one has the right to impose them ready-made on others. We can only compare an artist with himself, but there is profit and justice in noting dissimilarities; we shall try to point out not where the "newcomers" resemble each other, but where they differ, that is to say how they exist, for to exist is to be different.

This is not written to pretend that there are not obvious similitudes of thought and of technique between most of them; this is an inevitable fact and so inevitable that it is without interest. Nor would it be insinuated that this blossoming is spontaneous; before the flower there is the seed, itself fallen from a flower; these young men have fathers and masters; Baudelaire, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, Verlaine, Mallarmé and others. Living or dead they love them; read them, listen to them. What folly to think that we disdain those of yesterday! Who has a more admiring and more affectionate court than Stephan Mallarmé? And is Villiers forgotten? Is Verlaine neglected?

In the last few years the word mysticism has taken on so many diverse and even divergent meanings that it must be expressly re-defined every time it is written. Some give it a significance which would bring it near another word which seems plain, individualism; and it is certain that they touch, since mysticism may be called the state in which a soul, neglecting the physical world and disdainful of shocks and accidents, concentrates on its relations and direct intimacies with the infinite; now if the infinite is immutable and one, souls are mutable and many; one soul has not the same intercourse with God as its sisters, and God, although immutable and one, modifies himself according to the desire of each one of his creatures and does not say to one what he has just said to another. The privilege of the soul elevated to mysticism is liberty; even its body is only a neighbour to which it scarcely gives the friendly advice of silence; but if the body speaks, this soul only hears it through a wall, and if it acts, the soul only sees it act through a veil. Another name was given historically to such a state of life: quietism; M. Maeterlinck is very much a quietist in that phrase which shows us God smiling "at our most serious errors as we smile at puppies playing on a carpet." It is weighty, but it is true, if you think how small a thing a fact is and how a fact is produced and how we are carried away by the endless chain of Action and how little we really participate in our most decisive and most reasoned acts. Such a morality, leaving the task of useless judgements to miserable human laws, tears from life

the very essence of life and carries it to those higher regions where it fructifies, sheltered from those most humiliating contingencies, social contingencies. Mystic morality therefore ignores every work which is not marked with the double human and divine seal; so it has always been dreaded by clergies and bodies of magistrates; for, denying all apparent hierarchy, it denies, at least by implication, all social order; a mystic may consent to every slavery, but not to that of being a citizen.

Beauty in art is a relative result and is obtained by the mixture of very different elements, often the most unexpected. One only of these elements is stable and permanent; it must be found in every combination; that is novelty. A work of art must be new, and you recognise it as new simply because it gives you a sensation you have not experienced before.

I will not say that M. Vielé-Griffin is a joyous poet; however, he is the poet of joy. With him we participate in the pleasures of a normal and simple life, in the desires of peace, in the certitude of beauty, in the invincible youth of nature. He is neither violent nor sumptuous nor soft; he is calm. Although very subjective, perhaps because of that, for to think of oneself is to think of oneself wholly, he is religious. . . . One by one he knows and loves the elements of the forest, from the "great gentle ash trees" to

the "young million of the grasses" and it is his forest, his personal and original forest.

But he knows other flowers besides those usual in the glades; he knows the singing-flower, the lavender, marjoram or fairy which sings in the old garden of tales and ballads. The folk-songs have left in his memory refrains which he mingles with little poems which are his commentary or dream about them.

Like the forest, the sea enchants and intoxicates M. Vielé-Griffin; he has expressed it all in his first poems, that early *April Gathering,* the devouring insatiable sea, an abyss and a tomb, the wild sea with its proud and triumphant swell, the lascivious sea with voluptuous waves, the furious sea, the careless sea, the mute and tenacious sea, the envious sea which decks itself with stars or suns, with dawns or minutes—and the poet reproaches it with its stolen glory. Then he proclaims his pride at not having followed the sea's example, at not having sought for fame from happy reminiscences, from bold plagiarisms. It must be recognized that M. Vielé-Griffin who did not exaggerate then, has kept his word since; he has indeed remained himself, really free, really proud and really untamed. His forest is not limitless, but it is not an ordinary forest, it is a domain.

All the literature of to-day and especially that called symbolist, is Baudelairean, not certainly by its exterior technique but by its interior and spiritual technique, by its

sense of mystery, by its anxiety to hearken to what things say, by its desire to communicate soul to soul with the obscure thought spread through the night of the world.

Before he died, Baudelaire read Mallarmé's first poems; they made him uneasy; poets do not like to leave a brother or a son behind them; they would rather be alone and have their genius perish with their brain. But M. Mallarmé was only Baudelairean by filiation; his precious originality soon asserted itself; his *Proses,* his *Après-Midi d'un Faune,* his *Sonnets* came to prove at intervals, unfortunately too long, the marvellous subtlety of his patient, disdainful, imperiously gentle genius. Having voluntarily killed in himself the spontaneity of the impressionable being, little by little he replaced in himself the gifts of the poet by the gifts of the artist; he loved words for their possible sense more than for their true sense, and arranged them in mosaics of a refined simplicity. It has been said of him that he was a difficult author, like Persius or Martial. Yes, and like Hans Anderson's man who wove invisible threads, M. Mallarmé collects jewels coloured by his dreams whose glitter we are not always able, even with care, to perceive. But it would be absurd to suppose that he is incomprehensible; it is dishonest to quote verses which are obscure when taken from their context, for even in fragments M. Mallarmé's poetry, when it is beautiful, remains incomparably so.

By its fecundity in poets the present day which has al-

ready lasted ten years is scarcely comparable with any of the past epochs, even the richest in sun and flowers. There were the sweet morning walks in the dew, in the steps of Ronsard; there was a lovely afternoon when Théophile's weary viol sighed, heard among oboes and trumpets; there was the stormy, dark and royal romantic day, disturbed towards evening by the scream of a woman strangled by Baudelaire; there was the Parnassian moonlight, and the sun of Verlaine rose—and now, if you will, we are at midday in the midst of a large plain provided with everything necessary to make verses: grasses, flowers, rivers, rivulets, woods, caverns and young women so fresh that they are like the thoughts newly blossoming from a young unspoiled brain.

The wide plain is filled with poets, who do not walk in bands as in the time of Ronsard but alone with a rather shy air; they salute each other from afar with brief gestures. They have not all a name and some will never have one.

* * *

It has been said, which was the clumsy sign of a piously disturbed admiration and a paradoxical study has even been based on the saying, that: "Villiers de L'Isle-Adam was neither of his country nor of his time." That seems excessive, for after all a superior man, a great writer, is inevitably by his very genius one of the syntheses of his race and epoch, the representative of a momentary or fragmentary humanity, the brain and the mouth of a whole

tribe and not a transient monster. Like Chateaubriand, his brother in race and fame, Villiers was the man of the moment, of a solemn moment. Both, with different views and under different appearances re-created for a time the soul of the élite; from the former came romantic Catholicism and respect for traditional old stones, from the other came the idealistic dream and the cult of antique interior beauty; but one was also the proud ancestor of our fierce individualism, and the other taught us that the life about us is the only clay to work in. Villiers was of his time to the extent that all his masterpieces are dreams solidly based on modern science and metaphysics, like *L'Eve Future* and *Tribulat Bonhomet*, that vast admirable and tragic buffoonery wherein all the gifts of the dreamer, the ironist and the philosopher converge to make what is perhaps the most original creation of the century.

This point elucidated, it will be admitted that Villiers, a creature of terrifying complexity, naturally lends himself to contradictory interpretations; he was everything; a new Goethe, and though less conscious, less perfect, more piercing, more tortuous, more mysterious, more human and more familiar. He is always among us and he is in us, through his work and through the influence of his work which the best of the writers and artists of the present day gladly undergo; he reopened the gates of the beyond, shut, it will be remembered, so clamourously; and through those gates a whole generation has rushed towards the infinite. Among its clerks the ecclesiastical hierarchy reckons be-

sides its exorcists, the door-keepers whose duty is to open the gates of the sanctuary to all men of good will; for us Villiers performed both those functions—he was the exorcist of the real and the door-keeper of the ideal.

M. Tailhade has none of the grotesque blemishes of pride; none carries out more simply a more simple profession, that of a man of letters. The Romans called it a *rhetor* and that means the man who speaks, who tames words, who subjects them to the yoke of thought and knows how to handle them, to excite them, to goad them so that in the very hour of his fantasy he can impose upon them the roughest, the most dangerous, the most unheard-of labours. A Latin by race and tastes, M. Tailhade has a right to the fine name of rhetorician which shocks the incapacity of pedants; he is a rhetorician like Petronius, equally a master of prose and verse.

After writing *Sonnets* and *Vitraux,* poems which were strangely spiced by a disdainful mysticism, and *Terre Latine,* that touchingly beautiful prose, those perfect and unique pages whose style is always painfully pure, M. Tailhade became suddenly famous and feared from the cruel and excessive satires which he called, as a memory and witness of a journey we all make without fruit, *Au Pays du Mufle.* The ignominy of the age exasperated this Latin who delighted in sun and perfumes, in fine phrases and fine actions, for whom money is the joy we fling like flowers at the feet of women, and not the produc-

tive grain we bury in order that it may germinate. In them he showed himself the haughty executioner of hypocrisy and avarice, of false glory and true turpitude, of money and success, of the stock exchange upstart and the serial novel upstart. Harsh and even unjust he lashes his own hatreds; for him, as for all satirists, the private enemy becomes the public enemy, but what beautiful language, at once traditional and new, and what beautiful insolence!

Gravity is not necessary to the expression of what we believe to be the truth; the moral draught may be agreeably spiced by irony; there should be pepper in that camomile tea. To assert with disdain is one certain way of not being duped, even by one's own assertions. This is very useful in literature, for everything about it is uncertain, and art itself is no doubt only a game where philosophically we mutually deceive each other. That is why it is good to smile.

Among the newcomers there are not many dramatists, by which I mean fervent observers of the human drama, gifted with that wide sympathy which persuades a writer to fraternize with all the modes and all the forms of life. To some the motions of the vulgar seem negligible, perhaps because they lack that spirit of philosophical generalisation which raises the adventure of the humblest to the heights of a tragedy. Others admit they have a tendency to simplify everything, they only observe and compare facts

in order to make summaries and quintessences; they feel a scruple and a sort of modesty in relating mechanisms so often described; they build up portraits of souls, keeping only sufficient physical anatomy to have the material necessary to support the play of colours. Such an art, beside the fact that it has the inconvenience of repelling the bulk of readers (who want to be told stories and who ask them from the first person who comes along) is the sign of an obvious and too disdainful absence of passion; now, the dramatist is one impassioned, a mad lover of life and of to-day, not of the things of yesterday, those dead representations whose faded decorations are found in lead coffins, but creatures of to-day with all their animal beauties and ugliness, their obscure souls, their real blood which will spurt from a heart and not from a blown-up bladder, if they are stabbed in the fifth act.

* * *

He was a young man of furious and unexpected originality, a sick genius and, frankly, a mad genius. Imbeciles become madmen and in their madness imbecility remains crouched or agitated; in the madness of a man of genius there often remains genius; the form of the intelligence has been marked but not its quality, the fruit has been crushed in falling, but has kept all its perfume and all the savour of its scarcely over-ripe pulp.

Such was the adventure of the unknown prodigy Isidore Ducasse, self-ornamented with the Romantic pseudonym, Comte de Lautréamont. He was born at Monte-

video in April, 1846, and died at the age of twenty-eight, having published the *Chants de Maldoror* and *Poèsies,* a collection of thoughts and critical notes. . . .

The *Chants de Maldoror* are a long poem in prose of which only the first six cantos were written. It is probable that even if Lautréamont had lived he would not have continued it. As one reads through the book one feels his consciousness going, going—and when it returned to him a few months before he died, he wrote the *Poèsies* where, amid very curious passages, there is revealed the state of mind of a dying man who repeats and disfigures in his delirium his earliest memories, in this case the teachings of his professors!

The value of the *Chants de Maldoror* is not given by pure imagination; ferocious, demoniacal, disordered or exasperated with pride in demented visions, it frightens rather than it seduces; then, even in the unconscious there are possible influences to determine: "O nights, of Young," exclaims the author, "how much sleep you have cost me!" Here and there he is dominated by the romantic extravagances of certain English novelists still read in his time, Ann Radcliffe and Maturin (whom Balzac esteemed), Byron,[1] medical reports on cases of eroticism, and the Bible. He had certainly read, widely, and the one author he never mentions, Flaubert, can never have been far from his hand.

The value I was trying to define comes, I think, from

[1] He means the novel by Byron's secretary, Polidori.

the novelty and originality of images and metaphors, from their abundance, their logically arranged succession in the poem, as in the magnificent description of a shipwreck.

The talent of a writer is often only the terrible faculty of repeating in phrases which seem beautiful the eternal clamours of humanity. Even gigantic geniuses like Victor Hugo or Adam de Saint-Victor were fated to produce admirable music whose grandeur is to conceal the immense vacuity of deserts; their souls are like the shapeless and docile souls of sands and crowds; they love, they dream, they desire the loves, dreams and desires of all men and all beasts; poets, they cry magnificently what is not worth thinking.

For the non-artist, art is always immoral. For example, as soon as a writer wishes to translate the relations of the sexes into new speech he is immoral because inevitably he renders visible acts which, treated in the ordinary way, would remain unperceived, lost in the fog of commonplaces. Thus a writer who is not at all erotic may be accused publicly of stupid breaches of the law by foolish or malevolent persons.

The social life of a poet is as unimportant to the critic as to the Muse of Poetry herself who welcomes indifferently to her circle Burns the peasant and Byron the patrician, Villon the cut-purse and Frederick II, the King.

THE SECOND BOOK OF MASKS

[LE IIme LIVRE DES MASQUES]

1898

SOME men are not in harmony with their time; they never live with the life of the people; the soul of crowds does not seem to them very superior to the soul of herds.

If one of these men reflects on himself and comes to understand himself and to place himself in the vast world, he may grow sad, for about him he feels an invincible stretch of indifference, a mute Nature, stupid stones, geometrical movements; a great social solitude. And from the depths of his ennui he thinks of the simple pleasure of being in harmony, of laughing naturally, of smiling in an unreserved way, of being moved by long commotions. But there may come to him a pride in his re-

nunciation and his isolation, whether he has adopted the pose of a pillar-hermit or whether he has shut the gates of a palace on his pleasures.

M. Rebell has chosen the latter method; he presents himself to us in the attitude of a happy and disdainful aristocrat.

In a time when, little plagiarists of Seneca the philosopher that they are, the money-changers, the popular lawyers, the professors retired on an inheritance, the millionaires, the ambassadors, the tenors, the ministers and bankers, when the whole "republican nobility," hypocritically anxious to enjoy life, carefully melts over the "lot of the poor" at the very moment of setting its foot on their neck, at such a time it is pleasant to hear a few frank words and to hear M. Rebell say: "I want to enjoy life as it has been given to me, with all its richness, all its beauty, all its liberty, all its elegance; I am an aristocrat."

This does not mean that he is insensible to all natural suffering and that he scorns the people, like the typical bourgeois who hates every one above him and scorns every one below him; on the contrary M. Rebell loves the people but with a love too reasonable and too elevated for them to be touched by it. To a poor world inclined by stupid sermons towards the satisfactions of vanity and civic pride he would gladly suggest the simple joys of being a worthy animal. What is the use of suggesting the desire for intellectual pleasures to brains which are inevitably restive to disinterested emotions, to the elixirs

which do not first of all rasp the palate and warm the belly? Therefore "our present duty is to restore the diseased vines and to re-plant the destroyed vines, in order to intoxicate the whole of France."

The real theorist of naturalism, the man who contributed most to form that negative aesthetic of which *Boule de Suif* is the example, M. Th . . ., never wrote. It was by his conversation, by little gently sarcastic remarks that he taught his friends the art of enjoying turpitude, baseness and evil. His resignation to the annoyances of life was discreetly hilarious. With what a keen, prudent and satisfied air have I seen him smoke a bad cigar! He had planned a book, a single book, to be a synthesis of life produced by the simplest and most striking means: A little old employee gets up on Sunday in the suburbs and puts wine into bottles; and when all the bottles are full his day has ended. Nothing but that, not a reflection of the author (which is condemned by Flaubert), not an accident except, for example, the crisis of a damaged cork, not one useless movement, that is to say anything which might create a suspicion that beyond the walls there is perhaps an atmosphere of flowers, sky and ideas. This M. Th. . . . remains for me, for his wit charmed me, the type of writer who does not write. That his life was only one long irony, that there was bitterness underneath that morose delectation, no one ever suspected; he was always observed to conform his conduct faithfully to the princi-

ples he had patiently deduced from his experience and his reading.

For a work to be important, that is to say inexplicable, inexcusable, admirable in good, execrable in evil, it must appear disinterested, the initial wheels which move it must be of an absurd metal, an incomprehensible system, and the whole mechanism must unroll according to the mystery of principles wholly inaccessible to the populace of the faithful. In the eyes of a socialist what can be more stupid than the renunciation of every tangible joy by a person who devotes herself to the care of the aged sick with the sole object of "going to heaven"? And in the eyes of a Parisian journalist what can be more stupid than the renunciation of a writer who, able to earn money, devotes his fortune or his youth to the sole object of creating something new, of building along the mountain one more path leading to nothing, to pure art, to a naked statue of Beauty?

Here perhaps should come in the famous *sperne te sperni,* for it happens that the most despised enterprises become a source of fame and happiness. In the social domain it has happened that an association, founded by a Breton servant-girl, looks after more poor people in Paris than the state charities; and in the literary domain it has happened that a review founded with fifteen louis has more influence on the movement of ideas, and consequently on the movement of the world (and perhaps on the

rotation of the planets) than the proud collections of academic capital and commercial dissertations.

Absolutely, positivism is Christianity turned upside down; one of these beliefs places at the beginning what the other places at the end. It is a topographical question; was the earthly paradise the first stage of humanity, or will it be the last? Disrespectful persons place this question in the history of popular superstitions; they observe that a belief in an initial earthly paradise was and still is scattered over all points of the globe; then they also observe, and with no less pleasure, that the belief in a future earthly paradise—if millenarism and certain other reveries are excepted—made its first appearance in the world about the beginning of the eighteenth century; methodical researches would easily fix a date which must be contemporary with the utopian writings of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, a man of an adventurous genius.

Favoured by the observations of Darwin and the German philosophy of Becoming, and by the powerful illusion of material progress, the idea of a future earthly paradise has become the basis of socialism; to-day all the European populations are convinced that the realisation of social happiness is scientifically possible.

Confession is one of man's spiritual necessities. As soon as a man has a little intelligence, sensibility and taste for the games of the mind, he confesses himself in rhythmic

language; such is the origin of intimate and personal poetry. There are elegies of confession or despair among the oldest poems known, like the Ode of Sappho discovered in a papyrus. Catullus confessed himself with so much ingeniousness that the whole of his sentimental life may be found written in poems which are already in the style of Verlaine. The manuscripts of the middle ages are filled with confessions in rhythm, melancholy and reproving if they are the work of monks or penitent clerks; shameless in the manner of Horace or Ausonius, if they are Goliards who sang their loves and their feasts. That portion of French poetry which is most certain to live and to please is where troubled spirits have expressed their desire and their pain in living; there was Rutebeuf, there was Villon, Ronsard and Théophile; there was Vigny, there was Lamartine, there was Baudelaire and Verlaine; there have been hundreds, and the most awkward in disclosing his heart still moves us after years of cemetery or ages of dust.

AESTHETICS OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

[ESTHETIQUE DE LA LANGUE FRANCAISE]

1899

I THINK we should never hesitate to bring science into literature or literature into science; the age of fine ignorance has gone; we should welcome into our brains all the notions they can hold and remember that the intellectual domain is a limitless landscape and not a series of little gardens enclosed in walls of suspicion and disdain.

The true Latin free verse must be sought in the sequences. According to the definition of M. Léon Gautier, a sequence is a prose divided into periods or musical phrases. Now it seems that the new verse, free verse, may

also be called simply a musical period; and this period, while remaining bound harmoniously to all the other periods of the poem, must yet be separable from them and be able to live with its own single absolute life. . . .

This Latin verse, the verse of the sequences, is almost rhymeless and has a variable number of syllables and accents; as it differs from our idea of a Latin, French or German verse we must give it a new name and admit that after melodic verse and at the same time as syllabic verse there was in Latin a free verse. Although we do not understand it very well, it exists; it was cultivated during three or four centuries; it satisfied delicate ears accustomed to church singing; it was sung first of all, but it was read, since collections of it were made separate from the melody. That such a verse seems to us nearer to prose than it is actually, is no doubt the result of our ignorance; but even to-day and in our own literature it seems easier to feel than to define the shade of difference which separates free verse from rhythmic prose.

Not enough attention is given to bad writers; I mean, they should be chastised with a firmer hand. Certain persons should take upon themselves the task of annulling the work of imitators by pitiless criticism. The effort even of one poor in spirit to express his unfinished soul ingenuously is touching, like the battle of a blade of grass against a stone; the stone is sometimes conquered. The too persevering labour of tricksters should be destroyed, like a

spider's web, until the ugly beast is dead in its lair. Unless we limit ourselves (which is the scientific method) to observing literary manners in the disinterested fashion of Swammerdam or Réaumur, to observing the destruction made by men in the idea of beauty and all general ideas, as an entomologist follows with curiosity the traces of an invasion of green caterpillars on the flowers of his garden. It is difficult to conciliate this method with aesthetic sensibility, and nobody who loves art can promise that, if he adopts it, he will not depart from it. . . .

An original style is the infallible sign of talent, since in art everything which is not new is negligible. Outside of art, that is to say in works whose object is not the transposition of life into writing, forms or sounds, in abstract work or in those where the author must limit himself to historical exactitude, style may do without that novelty, lacking which, for example, a poem is inexcusable; a poem, a novel or any fiction, for in literature there is only poetry.

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The professions which admit of a constant use of speech or writing are the tenacious preservers of *clichés*. The political value of the Sphere, the Hydra and the Spectre is well known. There are numerous Spheres and their number increases as the necessity for imitation, through lack of intelligence, grows in the mediocre parliamentary mob. We have "the Sphere of influence, the diplomatic Sphere, the political Sphere, a wider Sphere, the intellectual Sphere, the moral Sphere, the Sphere of activity, a higher

Sphere, the Sphere of ideas, the Sphere of democratic progress, the Sphere of material interests, etc.," all locutions where "Sphere" no longer evokes any image except in certain disrespectful minds; not only has the word reached the last period of abstraction but in most cases it even appears to have no value but that of oratorical redundance, it corresponds to nothing. It is the same with Hydras and Spectres, two words so denuded of visual value that they are almost always interchangeable in the locutions dear to members of parliament. . . .

The political repertory is so rich in abstractions that one would be tempted to believe that the interests looked after by a deputy are entirely immaterial and like those which rhetoricians defend in their speeches at a general competition. These unfortunate men, devoured by verbalism, still possess a whole series of principles as well as those which are immortal, such as: The principle on which everything depends, a solidly based principle, the principle founded too slightly, the inflexible principle, the principle which has germinated in a fertile manner; they also hold the homage due to principles, the strange aberration of principles, sacred principles and consecrated principles. There is also the progress of enlightenment, the progress of our social disintegration, the constant progress towards the future; in that world they are always talking of "putting a red-hot iron on our wounds, or on the cancer which devours us, or on the gangrene of parliamentarism"; in 1840 they advised "the extirpation of the Jesuit gan-

grene which devours society." Not a day passes without our being told of "the rising tide of democracy, the invasion of democracy, the necessity for acquiring new vigour in the bosom of universal suffrage," and without a denunciation of those inhuman employers who "are fattened with the people's sweat" . . .

Such *clichés,* abstract for him who writes, retain the value of an image for him who reads; so if several metaphors of this kind are bound together by an awkward relation the resulting effect is amusingly comical. A phrase of Albert Wolf said: "Plunge a scalpel into this surface talent and what will remain in the last analysis? A handful of dust." Father Didon wrote in a book recently praised: "He who speaks to you has been plunged to the marrow in his age and country." This has been collected from a serious newspaper: "To destroy the fruits of the past is taking away its pedestal from the future." Where have I read: "These Augean stables must be cleansed with a red-hot iron!" And: "A soothing wind blows at last over the hydra of factions"? Have I read them? It is more convenient to invent these incoherencies than to look for real ones in the literature of imbeciles; for since there is imbecility, there is an absence of all literary sensibility. . . .

"The chariot of the state is tramelled in the waves of a stormy sea," was spoken in parliament, while the phrase where that same chariot "sails on a volcano" was an invention of Henry Monnier. . . . "It is in vain," cries an

orator, "that we make a good constitution if the key to the social road is lacking to us." . . . Méry exclaims fiercely: "A cry of despair, a superhuman cry corrosive as a tomtom!"

THE CULTIVATION OF IDEAS

[LA CULTURE DES IDEES]

1900

THERE are two ways of thinking. Either you accept ideas and associations of ideas as they are in general use, or, on your own account, you form new associations and, which is rarer, original dissociations of ideas. You imagine new relations between old ideas and old images; or you separate old ideas and old images united by tradition, examine them one by one, even if you re-form them into an infinity of new combinations which may again be split up. In the field of facts and experiments these operations are limited by the resistance of matter and the laws of physics; in the purely intellectual field they must submit to logic; but since logic itself is an intellectual structure it is almost infinitely obliging. . . .

Some associations of ideas are so durable that they appear eternal . . . they are usually called "commonplaces" . . . a commonplace is something more and something less than a banality; it is a banality, but sometimes unavoidable; it is a banality but so universally accepted that it is called a truth. Most truths which fly about the world may be considered as commonplaces, that is, associations of ideas common to a great many men and such that hardly one of these men would dare to break intentionally. Man, in spite of his tendency towards mendacity, has a great respect for what he calls truth; truth is his travelling-staff in life, commonplaces are the bread in his scrip, the wine in his bottle. Deprived of commonplaces, men would find themselves defenceless and without food. They need truths so much that they adopt new truths without abandoning old truths, and so the mind of a civilized man is a museum of contradictory truths. . . .

A few analytical minds have attempted in vain to draw up an inventory of their contradictions; to each objection of reason, sentiment immediately finds a good excuse, for sentiments, as M. Ribot has shown, are the strongest things in us and represent permanence and continuity. . .

Man associates ideas not according to logic, according to verifiable exactitude, but according to his pleasure and his interest. And consequently many truths are nothing but prejudices.

A rather curious illustration of these principles may be found by examining the present state of sexual morality. This morality, peculiar to the Christian nations, is founded upon the very close association of two ideas, the idea of carnal pleasure and the idea of procreation. Whosoever, whether a man or a nation, has not dissociated these two ideas, has not freed in his mind the elements of this truth: that outside the act of procreation accomplished under the protection of religious or civil laws (the latter are only the parody of the former in our essentially Christian civilisations), sexual relations are sins, errors, faults, weaknesses; whosoever adopts in his conscience that rule, which is sanctioned by the laws, obviously belongs to a civilisation which is still rudimentary. Since the highest civilisation is that where the individual is freest, the least burdened with obligations, this proposition would only be contestable if it were taken as a provocation to debauchery or as a depreciation of asceticism. It is of no importance whether it is moral or immoral; if it is exact, it can be read in the facts at a glance. Nothing could be more easy. A statistical table of the European birth-rate will show the most obstinate arguers that there is a very strict link, the link of cause and effect, between the intellectuality of nations and their fecundity. It is the same for individuals and for social groups. It is from intellectual weakness that working-class homes allow themselves to overflow with progeny. In the suburbs you may see wretches who, having procreated a dozen children, are sur-

prised at the harshness of life; these poor people, who have not even the excuse of religious beliefs, have not yet succeeded in dissociating the idea of carnal pleasure from the idea of procreation. With them the former determines the latter, and their movements obey an infantile and almost animal brain power. The man who has reached a really human degree limits his fecundity as he wishes; it is one of his privileges, but one of those he only attains in order to die out. . . .

It was fairly late when the Greeks succeeded in separating the idea of woman and the idea of procreation; but they had dissociated very early the idea of procreation and the idea of carnal pleasure. When they ceased to consider woman as solely procreative, the reign of the hetairae began. Besides, the Greeks seem always to have had a very vague sexual morality, which has not prevented them from making a figure in history.

Much has been said of ideas; people have written on the evolution of ideas. There is no vaguer or worse-defined word. There are naïve writers who dissertate on the "Idea," there are co-operative societies which suddenly start out towards the Idea; there are people who devote themselves to the Idea, who suffer for the Idea, who dream of the Idea, who live with their eyes fixed on the Idea. I have never been able to learn what was being discussed in these sorts of ravings. Employed by itself alone, the word is perhaps a deformation of the word Ideal; per-

haps also the qualificative is to be understood? Is it a wandering fragment of Hegel's philosophy which the slow movement of the great social glacier has deposited as it passed in certain heads where it rolls and rattles like a pebble? We do not know. Employed in a relative form, the word is not much clearer in ordinary phraseologies; people forget too often the primitive meaning of the word and that idea is only an image which has reached the abstract state, the state of a notion; and also that a notion, to have a right to the name of idea, must be pure from everything compromising it with the accidental. A notion in the status of an idea has become indisputable; it is a figure, a sign; it is one of the letters in the alphabet of thought. There are not true and false ideas. The idea is necessarily true; an arguable idea is an idea amalgamated with concrete notions, that is to say, a truth. The labour of dissociation tends precisely to disengage the truth from all its fragile portion in order to obtain the pure, single and consequently unassailable idea. But if we never used words except according to their unique and absolute meaning, the connecting links in talk would be difficult; we must leave them a little of the vagueness and flexibility with which custom has endowed them and especially we must not insist too much on the gap which separates the abstract from the concrete.

The idea of liberty as presented to us by politicians is one of these incoherences. When we hear the word we

hardly discern anything except political liberty, and yet it appears as if all the liberties a civilised man can enjoy are contained in this ambiguous expression. The pure idea of liberty is like the pure idea of justice; it can be of no use to us in the ordinary business of life. Neither man nor Nature is free, any more than man and Nature are just. Reasoning has no hold on such ideas. To express them is to assert them, but they would necessarily falsify every argument into which they were brought. Reduced to its social sense, the idea of liberty is still imperfectly dissociated; there is no general idea of liberty and it is hard to form one, since the liberty of an individual is only exercised at the expense of the liberty of others. At one time liberty was called Privilege, and that perhaps is its true name; even to-day, one of our relative liberties, the liberty of the press, is a collection of privileges; the liberty of speech granted to advocates is also a privilege; so is the liberty of trades-unions.

Men's principle occupation is the search for happiness, and they are much more anxious to reason according to their interests than in accordance with logic. Hence the universal aversion from joining the idea of nothingness with the idea of death. Although the first idea is obviously contained in the second, humanity persists in considering them separately; it opposes their union with all its strength, indefatigably it thrusts between them a delusive wedge on which sound the hammer strokes of hope.

This is the finest example of illogicality we can give ourselves and the best proof that, in serious as well as in trivial things, sentiment always gets the better of reason.

Catholicism is Paganized Christianity. It is a religion at once mystic and sensual; it can satisfy, and for a very long time has solely satisfied, the two primordial and contradictory tendencies of humanity; which are to live at once in the finite and in the infinite, or, in more acceptable terms, in sensation and intelligence.

From Constantine to the Renaissance, Catholicism developed normally the two principles which constitute it, and, but for the intervention of Luther, it is very probable that the pagan principle of art and beauty would have acquired as much strength as the evangelical principle of renunciation and mortification. Leo X and Julius II might indeed take pride in the name of Pontifex Maximus; they were indeed the successors both of St. Peter and of the high priest of Jupiter Capitolinus. Luther and Calvin, the great assertors of the Gospel, the harsh sectarians of St. Paul, the enemies of Rome and Roman glory, involved all Christendom in their dreary errors; Catholicism, denying itself, accepted the sacrifice of one of its natural elements; it destroyed itself one of its principles of life and, conquered, the Church little by little became what it is today, a hierarchal Protestantism as cold, as full of hate against all art and all visible beauty, but perhaps less liberal in intelligence, even more shrivelled up, subject

at once to a past it respects without loving and to a present which terrifies its decrepitude. No religion has ever died or will ever die; the religion whose name is abolished re-lives in that which glows in full daylight. In the fifth century they did not even take the trouble to change the venerated statues in several temples of Italy, and Demeter the mother quite naturally became a Virgin and child; in others, even in Gaul, they kept the name of the god with the old statue, and the cult, which was changed in the belief of the priests, remained immutable in the belief of the people. Venus is still beloved under the name of Saint Venise, who is represented in images quite naked with only a ribbon around her loins. Admirable example of the perseverance of the people! Ozanam has perfectly demonstrated that at the moment when Christianity, by a state decree, became the official religion of the Empire, paganism was still full of strength and life; hence its influence on the new religion, which, not being able to destroy it, absorbed it without even transforming it. However, from the earliest ages there was in the Church a party very much opposed to what they called, without understanding their importance, popular superstitions; this was the evangelical party which finally triumphed only with the Reformation in the North of Europe.

The cult of Saints and sanctified gods produced churches. The Catholic churches, like the temples of ancient Egypt, are tombs; they were not constructed in honour of God alone; their pretext was almost always to pro-

Remy de Gourmont

tect the body of a saint or of a miracle-worker, the representation of a traditional divinity barely re-baptised by an innocent piety. Churches were the necessity of Christian art, and thus apostolic nudity had to adorn itself with the gold of idols and the purple of emperors. In the twelfth century paganism was restored in all its splendour. The church, everywhere that devotion was rich enough, became the cathedral. Europe was covered with cathedrals; the meadow had all its morning flowers and an immense concourse of people, leaving their hives, went from flower to flower, from sanctuary to sanctuary, gathering indulgences, comfort, grace, cures, the strength to live happily in a hard age. The crutches of the Temple of Ephesus were piled under the vaults of the Cathedral of Chartres where a fair idol, recently brought from the East, blessed the intoxicated faithful and was venerated under the name of the Black Virgin. Catholic art, like religion itself, is the natural and logical successor of pagan art.

There is a Catholic art; there is no Christian art; evangelical Christianity is essentially opposed to all representation of visible beauty, whether of the human body or of the rest of nature. St. Paul does not know what a Christian temple is; still less a Christian statue; he has not the notion that a beautiful thing may be an ornament added to the beauty of a pure heart. If such a Christianity had been developed the old civilisations would be unknown to

us; the religion of St. Paul imperatively demanded the destruction of the temples which became the Italian basilicas, the smashing of the idols, those statues which preserved in the world the idea of a disinterested and purely human art; profane literature would have been annihilated with the rest; the propagation of the Gospel would have been the propagation of barbarity and, to put it plainly, the cross would have been as dreadful and as destructive a scourge as the crescent; the two daughters of the Bible would have covered the world with ruins, with flocks and tents of camel-hair. St. Paul's occupation was weaving tents; never did an occupation better symbolise the character of a man. The first concern of the Christians who wished to bring back religion to its first purity was a most furious iconoclasm. Zwingli, at Zurich, smashed all the glass, broke the statues, burned the illuminated missals. Entering the Church of All Saints at Wittenberg, Carlstadt shouted the verse of Deuteronomy: "Thou shalt not make any graven image," a signal of devastation immediately understood by the mob which followed the dreary fanatic. I remember I could not see without emotion what the Dutch Calvinists have done to their cathedrals. All who have entered St. Lawrence at Rotterdam know that Christianity, as soon as it aspires to return to evangelical simplicity, delights not in austerity but in banality; a lecture-hall with plain windows and rows of seats, that is what the barbarians wanted to make of Our Lady of Chartres. The Christian

ideal in architecture is exactly like the democratic ideal; it is the school group, and neither of these inspirations is capable of producing a building equal in beauty to the barn wherein during the thirteenth century the Cistercians of Lisseweghe stored their harvest. On the other hand it frequently happens that Cistercian abbeys are of an almost desolate nudity. St. Bernard, when reforming the Cistercian order, which became the Trappists, had no intention whatever of allowing a display of grandiose architecture; faithful in this to the pure spirit of the Gospel, he condemned luxury and despised art, as St. Francis of Assisi did later. Every time that Christianity, through the monks or through revolutions, tried to force itself to more conformity with apostolic teaching, it was forced to reject everything pagan, beautiful and consequently sensual, in the religion of Rome. There is no Christian art; the two words are contradictory. . . .

The pagan origin of the symbolism of the Catacombs is certain; mythology furnished the decorative elements for the tombs of the first martyrs. Far from attempting a new art, the Christians accepted that which was then familiar to all, and at first invented scarcely anything except the admirable type of the Orant. Victories, Loves, Medusa, Prometheus, the Dioscuri, the Seasons, Icarus, Silenus, the Rivers, Psyche and Love are the subjects frequently met with in the decoration of the Catacombs. Had they taken on a new meaning for the Christians?

It is not thought so. However the Vine, funereal among the Romans, assumes a quite opposite meaning in the Catacombs, where it is frequent; it represents life and Christ, no doubt in conformity with the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. Orpheus early had a Christian legend; St. Augustine gives him, like the Sibyl, the value of a prophet; in the Catacombs he pre-figures Christ, by his gentleness, the charm of his voice and his painful death. He is never represented with Eurydice, but alone and surrounded with animals listening to the sound of his Lyre. There, taken in the act, is the Christian deformation of an earlier symbol. Little by little Orpheus was reduced to one lamb as audience, he was identified with the Good Shepherd, and from this last figuration Christian symbolism finally retained only the Lamb. It has been thought that the Good Shepherd was a transposition of Apollo Criophorus, but nothing has yet proved it, although it is possible. Thus, in Catholic art, the idea comes from Christianity and the figuration from paganism.

A religion is a very complex body of superstitious practices by which men render the Divinities favourable. Such systems are not to be perfected; they must be accepted exactly as the generations have organised them, or they must be rigourously denied. The oldest are the best; it is very absurd to try to make children's games reasonable and a great folly to try to purify religions. Games over-

seen by vexatious masters still remain games, although less amusing ones; reformed religions still remain religions, but shorn of all their puerile grace. A belief, whatever it may be, is a superstition. If it is a pious act to believe it and pray to one God, there is a larger and finer piety in believing in all the gods of the Pantheon and offering fruits and lambs to them all. Why only Jupiter or only Jehovah? Have they demonstrated their objective existence any better than the heroes or the saints? By taking away from Christianity the cult of the saints, the Protestants took away from it everything that made its human truth. Perhaps the true gods ought first of all to have lived; their choice will then be dictated to the people by their idea of the divine state, that is the heroic state. It is easier to make an agreement with gods who were men or who, at least, resemble men by their bodies, even though perfected by their passions, and their loves; and almost all religion revolves about that simple and moral act, a contract.

If we neglect transitory and local forms, it may be said that there has never been but one religion, popular religion, eternal and immutable as human sentiment itself. What has been modified is the religious spirit, that is to say the manner of interpreting or denying symbols; but that takes place in heads which really have no need for religion, since they argue. True religion is a matter for belief and not for controversies. It is a matter of experi-

ence and not of historical or philosophical demonstrations. Did lame pilgrims, yes or no, leave their crutches at Ephesus or at Lourdes? That is the question, which was not a question for those who saw it. All idea of truth, and even of relative truth, should be separated from religious studies. A religion is useful and it lives; useless, and it dies. True religion is a form of therapeutics; but it goes further and heals more obscure maladies and with more naïve methods than natural medicine. It heals even the vague spiritual unrest of simple souls; and that is a very fine thing. All means seem good to it, if you like; but what is useful to a man without harming other men is never bad.

To laugh at religious superstition or to denounce it, is to admit that one belongs to a sect, at least a secret one. At a certain level above ordinary psychologies one looks upon the Lord's Prayer and the prayer of St. Apolline against the toothache, as facts of the same order. As soon as there is belief there is superstition. One must put up with that and not try to limit the absurd. When Luther, after having consulted the Holy Scriptures, declares that there are only three sacraments, he talks like a paltry fellow. He is counting the pebbles in Tom Thumb's pocket and calculating whether they were granite or grind-stone. Is the talking-rose a tea or a moss rose? All religious battles are waged around problems of this importance; or what jewels made the hoopoe's crest?

Popular Catholicism has regained in the motley field of superstition all the ground it had yielded to rationalism under the dreary influence of the Reformation. A whole mythology is flowering under our eyes; it has not received from poetry the prestige of Greek legends; but that is so much the better for science, since it is less deformed. I think it would be more sensible to study it than to laugh at it. Do we laugh at the absurdity of the inexplicable labours of Hercules? Excellent dissertations have been composed on the genesis of triple gods, but without noticing that during the last sixty years and less, one and perhaps two new trinities, interlaced with each other, have been born before our eyes, and that against the will even of those who created them by the anxious zeal of their piety. New saints, new gods have emerged from the shadow without having been noticed by those who discuss the origin of divinities. And yet the present explains the past marvellously; what is not mysterious to-day was not so in the past; what is only an elementary fact of psychology was no more in earlier ages. Men have not yet been taught sufficiently to live in the present, and besides they dislike doing so. Some go to the past, where at least there are gleams of light; others, the eternal wonder-struck, turn to the future, that ironical heaven. Having established what they call the laws of history, which upon the whole are only the logical coordination of their desires, the dreamers gravely arrange the morrow of days they forget to live. As if there were a future! As if the future could

be perceived as the future, as if life were ever realised outside the present, the very minute when the sensation informs us of our existence!

Books are composed on the religion and even on the irreligion of the future. They are amusing productions. About the time when Cicero foresaw a future of science and of philosophy, of intellectual freedom, there was born in Judea among the wood-shavings of a hut, a peasant named Joseph. The future is no clearer for us than it was for Cicero at the time when he laughed at the Augers.

Some years ago there was a prosecution in the law-courts of the work of a certain Dr. Moll, who had treated that gallant subject, "the perversions of the sexual instinct;" and this seemed ridiculous, for the learned man's worst revelations were already in Tardieu and before Tardieu in Liguori, and before Liguori in Martial and the *Priapeia*, and so on to the beginning of the world. If in recent ages grave literature is rather scanty on these matters, reserved for the back-shop of booksellers doomed to the Place de Grève, the reason is that people knew Latin and that antiquity provided for curiosity; it was thus that sodomy was considered a capital crime and that sapphism on the contrary, seemed to our indulgent ancestors the natural pastime of good little girls. In the seventeenth century it was avowed and entered into the gallantry of the *précieuses*. The provincial grossness of La Palatine was needed for the virtuous Maintenon to be insulted on this

subject. They called it "an innocent intercourse," and they laughed at the "imperfect joy" of such pastimes, and "young ladies' secretaries" gave models of amorous epistles for these little intrigues. By becoming democratic our civilisation began to take everything seriously; the world was guided by intellectual upstarts who trembled before the catechism which the old aristocracies made their servants teach the people. Thus there was formed a sexual morality and, since public opinion must be reckoned with, people have been brought to treat seriously questions which humanity long ago solved to its advantage.

Science, which should be only the registration of facts and the search for causes, has come, through impotence to perform its duty, to its legislative period. Free love engenders evident evils which no one denies; let us have a law against love; alcohol is dangerous; let us have a law against alcohol; opium, ether, and perhaps *kif* menace us; let us have a law against these drugs. And why not a law against game, truffles and burgundy, so cruel to certain constitutions? And why should not hygiene be codified like morality? Are not domestic animals rationed?

More fortunate than Plato and Campanella, the modern legislators of love open up a way where, alas, they have a good chance of being followed. They flatter so cleverly the tyrannical method of democracy! It is nat-

ural that if power is in the hands of the weak the laws tend to protect weakness. The people have a certain consciousness of their incapacity to guide themselves and it is quite probable that they would gladly accept a law which protected them against syphilis, as well as a law which would prevent them from getting drunk. The modern tendency is to divide human liberties into two parts; after they have suppressed all those it is possible to suppress, there will be a rigourous regulation of the others. What could a law against love be based on? "Why," replies M. Feré, who philosophises willingly and not without talent, "on private and public utility, on utility in present society, which is present morality." That is a principle and it is beginning to spread. Let us not take it tragically, however, for the individualist theories provide sufficient known and often-used arguments to destroy it. It was not born to-day; Goethe condescended to laugh at it; when Auguste Comte made it the basis of his social system, an intelligent man immediately recognised that he was trying to create a happy humanity with men whose individual happiness had been destroyed.

The idea of sacrifice is one of the most perverse which Christianity has enthroned. Put into action it may be expressed thus: denial of a known good in favour of an unknown good. We know what we sacrifice and the pleasure of which we deprive ourselves; we do not know the true repercussion of our sacrifice on others and often

the ill which we take upon ourselves will be a still greater one for our favourite.

How many women, since we are discussing matters of love, ought for their eternal happiness to have been raped, and how many have suffered from the too noble reserves of their lover! How many children and especially Christian girls brought up on the feeding-bottle of sacrifice, lead a dreadful life, dragging like a chain one of the verses of the Jewish Gospel! If a society cannot live without the notion and practice of sacrifice, I do not know whether it is bad, but it is absurd. Force has the rights of force, it exceeds them by throwing over the world aphorisms enveloped in virtue like snares hidden under dead leaves. If sacrifice is not a spontaneous act of love, if it is imposed by a catechism or a code, it is one of the most revolting crimes a man can commit against himself; whether the sacrifice be of a man to a man or of a man to a group, it is only aggravated by changing its character. It is a pleasure to renounce a pleasure to secure the joy or peace of mind of a person one loves; and it is a pleasure because it is an egotistic act, because delighting in one's other self, is delighting in oneself. Here we are in the natural order of things and in the logic of sensibility. But what is the value of this renunciation if it is for the benefit of an unknown person or, which is going further, for the benefit of an abstraction, one of the words of the dictionary? What exact value? That of an act of slavery. Voluntary slaves are the worst; sacrifice is always voluntary since it

implies at least the martyr's consent. Therefore when men are asked to sacrifice their personal pleasures to the prosperity of society they are being asked to act as slaves, to hand over to the laws the administration of their sensations, the direction of their movements, the general management of their sensibility. We recognize the herd with its privileged stallions, its reproductive females and the hoard of neuters sacrificed under pretext of the general good to a utility which has not even any connection with the preservation of the species.

Since everything in man comes back to the intelligence, everything in history should come back to psychology.

A truth is dead when it is observed that the relations which bind its elements are relations of habit and not of necessity; and . . . the death of a truth is a great benefit to mankind. . . .

We cannot ask a humble politician to entertain the same simple idea of the army as Napoleon did—a sword. Very simple ideas are only within the reach of very complicated minds.

Justice is the dead point of a series of acts, the ideal point where contrary forces neutralize each other and produce inertia. . . . The reign of justice could only be the reign of silence and of petrification.

Language is a great cause of dupery. It evolves in abstraction, and life evolves in the most concrete reality; between the word and the things which the word indicates there is the distance between a landscape and the description of a landscape.

Beauty is what is in its place. . . . Or rather, beauty is a logic which is perceived as pleasure.

To accept art because it may moralize individuals or masses is like accepting roses because they yield a lotion useful to the eyes.

In the last analysis the idea of decadence is identical with the idea of imitation.

In the past a man rose up as the buckler of faith against innovations and heresies—the Jesuit; to-day too often rises up that champion of rules, the Professor.

A new manner of expressing the eternal human verities is a scandal at first to men, especially to over-educated men.

It is because they know little about each other that the nations hate each other little; an alliance always ends, after much fraternisation, in cannon-shots.

Even in literature men only hate seriously when material interests enliven a little the struggle for the ideal.

Excommunication is not a philosophical gesture.

The martyrs who refused to burn incense to the idols would have been greatly surprised to learn that the censer would become an instrument of piety.

Saint Augustine speaks of evil spirits as people to-day talk of microbes.

If men have an abstract notion of goodness they must place it somewhere; it cannot be in themselves, for they are cowardly, cruel and perjured: God is made of what is least human in man.

There is a mollusc which can only become a shell by taking an abandoned carapace; Christianity became a religion by inserting itself into mythological paganism, whose interior organs had become weakened by age.

A Roman Pope is necessarily superior to a barbarous god. He is civilised.

The political minds of our time known as "advanced," the collectivists, for instance, have a childish air because of their belief—religious in origin—that human nature

can be changed by changing human laws. They bridle the horse's tail with gentle obstinacy.

No law will prevent a loquacious woman from gossiping nor a lascivious woman from seeking lovers.

Most frequently charitable acts are only commercial acts, sale, purchase, exchange: to win heaven, to win general esteem, to win self-esteem; to purchase a joy; to get rid of a remorse; to exchange a coin for a blessing; the purchase of a favourable chance, an advantage even though problematic, happiness even though illusory.

Charity has become one form of advertising.

Statistics are the art of depriving numbers of all the reality they contain.

THE VELVET PATH

[LE CHEMIN DE VELOURS]

1902

WHAT an extraordinary man Loyola was, what a creator of energy, and what a psychological genius! No one before him understood, and perhaps no one since, that what makes the weakness of a man is his own will. A man without will, if he is healthy and of average intelligence is fit for almost all occupations, almost all situations. In a nation all the individuals are equal as instruments and the worst are still capable of good service. The defect is consciousness which creates indecision, idleness, awkwardness and debases the will. Now, a diseased will renders a man unfit for action and makes him a being dangerous to himself and others. Take away consciousness and all men would be utilizable, like horses, like dogs or reindeer. But the state of man is bound up

with the existence of consciousness. Man is an animal who has the privilege of watching himself act; and the older he is in civilisation, the more cultivated he is, the more delight he takes in watching himself. It also seems that the intelligence, which is very variable, is maintained in a certain relation to psychological consciousness, which is equally valuable. It is not a matter of abolishing consciousness, which is an impossibility, but of avoiding its evil influence. Consciousness contaminates the will, the principle or forerunner of action; the will of a man is cut off and in its place an exterior will is grafted.

People are surprised that there are fifty or sixty thousand monks in France. That there are so few proves the race's force of resistance and its youth. In Thibet and Mongolia half the men are monks; there are monasteries of six to eight thousand. No opium is comparable with the vow of obedience; no slavery of happy love gives a similar bliss.

But the Jesuit is neither a Buddhist monk nor even a Carthusian; the Jesuit is a man of action. His pleasure is not that of the opium smoker; it is not that of the passenger, nor that of the traveller smiling at the landscape; it is rather the pleasure of the soldier by profession and taste, a soldier who is gentle, subtle, smiling, firm in his duty, passively obedient, gay and discreet.

To walk without slipping on the velvet path a man must have freed his shoulders from the burden of will.

The Jesuits hardly believed in the responsibility of the sinner; no more than the philosopher of to-day believes in the responsibility of the criminal. But the theologian could excuse and absolve the sinner, which the philosopher cannot advise the law to do with the criminal. The conclusions are different; the principles are the same.

It would be very surprising if, during two or three centuries, hundreds of studious men should have worked over the whole psychology of the sinner without deriving from it new and accurate ideas. In that domain the Jesuits made many small discoveries. One of the best was that of invincible ignorance. To establish the moral irresponsibility of man at the very time when animals were supposed to have a will, when the fables propagated the old legend of their superiority, when harmful animals were still prosecuted criminally and excommunicated by bishops, and to proclaim that in many cases there may be a sin or a misdemeanour without any guilty person—that was an act of intellectual boldness and scientific probity.

The theological axiom of Father de Rhodez "that sin cannot be greater than conscience prescribes" would perhaps be a good starting-point for a philosophical discussion of the Law. It seems we should come to the conclusion that, far from proclaiming all men equal before the law, we ought to say: "Men are unequally responsible before the law." This is the principle of extenuating circumstances, of excuses, of the law of reprieve. But the Jesuits went much further, so far as to say that the moral

law should take no interest in cases which are incurable, in consciences which are invincibly darkened. Since they relied on observation, the critical examination of life, they were hardly ever wrong. Those who talk of law, of the imperative, of the absolute, in a word the a priorists, are almost always wrong and if their dogmas coincide with reality, it is by chance and because everything happens.

The multiplicity of cases of conscience discussed by the casuists clearly shows that in their view there are as many moralities as there are individuals or at least as there are groups of characters or of temperaments. Common morality, which is Christian (because there is no other) is a bridle which is tightened indifferently going up or down hill. Some find themselves reassured by it, others paralysed. The victims of vice are perhaps no more numerous than the victims of virtue, but what a bubble is the idea of virtue! Is it not clear that for a phlegmatic person a fit of rage would be an act of virtue, that is, of reaction, and similarly an act of debauchery for one who is frigid? And, on the contrary, temperance is the effort and the virtue of the high-mettled, and of them alone. There is the double point of view, with its shades and combinations like a compass-card, to watch and judge human beings. Abstract morality is retrograde; it throws back the men of to-day to the imitation of an ancient character. Because a carpenter of Judea, all dreams and words, avoided women or only wanted them as servants, love is supposed to be a crime; and because he lived as a parasite,

money is supposed to be evil; and because he was of humble origin, the pride of race and family is supposed to be ridiculous; and thus there are seven deadly sins, which others now call the seven theological virtues, and vice versa. But we must not allow the spirit of contradiction to make us create an antinomian absolute over against the Christian absolute. There are only accidents. There are cases of conscience; there is no morality; there are diseases and a few remedies.

The Jesuits are men of action and have very little esteem for the inactive virtues, such as chastity; they are optimists and place the preservation of existence above all other goods. In his *Commentary on the Prophet Daniel,* Cornelius a Lapide says tactfully: "The chaste Suzanna acted like an heroic woman; but in such a peril of infamy and death, she could have limited herself to enduring everything from the two old men without consenting or cooperating inwardly, because existence and reputation are more valuable than chastity. . . . Young and chaste virgins think themselves guilty if they do not struggle and resist with all their strength and by screaming, whereas it is sufficient to detest and execrate the act to which they are forced." Girls and women have always been of that opinion. They know that the world, to which acts are indifferent, is only affected by scandal. A half-raped girl who is delivered in time from her aggressor has lost her reputation; she who has endured everything behind closed

doors remains as if she were intact. This amounts to saying that, faithful to the velvet path, the Jesuit advises one to choose the less of two evils. It is not heroic. No doubt, but humanity is not made up of heroes, and besides heroes create their own morality. It is a matter of practical life, and of warning men against the great abstract principles which are nothing but snares wherein those who formulate them take good care not to fall. Every suspicious adventurer boasts the "better death than dishonour." I prefer the actress who said on this topic with a smile—just the contrary. But when the dishonour is secret and is accompanied with a pleasure, it would be very stupid to prefer death or public infamy. This is what Father Taberna asserts: "A girl does not sin, if in peril of death or infamy she remains purely passive and does not employ all the means at her disposal to drive away the seducer, such as killing him or calling in the neighbours." The poor girl would be greatly benefited by reading the account of her victory in all the papers or by having to appear at the assize court with the air befitting a modest victim of eroticism! It is hard to find the casuists in default, especially the late-comers who profited by earlier observations and a wider observation of manners. They knew human nature and the power of prejudices. Neither dupes nor hypocrites, they did not consent to preach an inapposite morality; they preferred to be useful rather than to acquire a reputation for stoicism and integrity by the easy method of writing.

Alexandre Dumas, in his *Question of Divorce,* inveighs with the hypocrisy of an old broken-down debauché against the delicate tolerance of the theologians who permit a woman, dazed and not satisfied by the brutal attack of the man, to finish in her own way what an egoistic and too rough contact has only begun. There indeed is morality ill-placed! Why not leave men and women to be the judges of their own pleasures and the pilots of their own boats! But the casuist here is only the echo of women's complaint. Men think they know women, and that does happen. But who knows men? Who, outside the confessor or the doctor, has heard the wail of woman always disappointed? Her slowness in being moved leaves her a step in the rear, and the man never turns his head. Every night Tantalus feels the vain caress of an ironical pleasure. The victim is left—what? Adultery or despair. For her frigidity is not left calm, the temptation returns with the certainty of a fever fit, all her organism again will be shaken, wrenched, strained; and the shaft eternally breaks and falls.

This occurrence is so common that twenty years ago a doctor took up again the casuist's thesis. But he places the assistance before the act, and confides the care of it to the man. But to think there are men for whom such prescriptions must be written! There are, and many of them. And they are the best, the healthiest; voluptuousness is a human creation, a delicate art for which only a few are apt, as for music or painting. Nature cares noth-

ing about pleasure; for her the act suffices. But theologians held a contrary belief and thought that the effective participation of the woman was essential to fertilisation. Hence their compliance. However, if pleasure is not necessary and often quite useless to fertilisation, it is necessary to the soundness of the nervous system. Starting from a false principle the casuists reached a passable conclusion. Besides the women asked for absolution and not for permission. The casuist often wrote under the dictation of woman.

Why did the casuists study cases of conscience in matters of love? But why are there now on sale thirty or forty popular medical works where sexual relations are examined with much less decency than in Sanchez or Liguori? The reason is that men used to think of their salvation and now think of their health. And they wanted to attain their salvation as to-day they want to keep their health, without depriving themselves of any of their pleasures. The casuists reassured them; the doctors comfort them. In such matters especially humanity intends to remain immutable; for it realises perfectly that if it were cured of its vices it would suddenly find itself cured of life, that is of the pleasure of life.

There are many truths, but there is no Truth; then we must make distinctions. Psychology is made up of distinctions, and politics, and the very art of living. An act

changes its value according to whether it is committed by a man, a woman, a child, in a closed room, in the street, on the raft of the Medusa, in a war, at a festival, and so on, through some hundreds of words. But each one of these words may be modified by the epoch, the country, the society and the moment wherein it is pronounced; and thus we obtain a series of relativities stretching towards infinity. Acts have been classified under certain headings; and this is one method. In reality, a human act is unique of its kind; it can only be judged by a judgment which specially qualifies it. Laws are merely rough police methods; they ensure justice by cultivating injustice. . . .

The theologians, and those of the Company of Jesus first of all, anticipated by two or three centuries the boldest defenders of the mob. That is why the old monarchies in their crises of despotism accused them of anarchy and banished them. Perhaps the monarchies were right. We must live, and life can only be maintained by justice. When the masters are in power the blows fall on the slaves; if the State is governed by a coalition of slaves, injustice is let loose against the masters. Strife is a right; and all strife implies the alternatives of conquerors and conquered. Every doctrine, whether of authority or of anarchy, one day becomes the ruling doctrine.

The casuist, especially if he is one of the Company, is only concerned with the present; his task is to conciliate the law with manners, to soften what is too distressing

in certain natural or professional duties. He found excuses for thieves, he will not fail to find them for prostitutes. They exercise an indecent occupation; doubtless, and who denies it? But it is their occupation, and the characteristic of an occupation is that it should provide a living. Tamburini (the name is appropriate to this ludicrous exegesis) therefore recognises the lawfulness of the "price of stupration". The word here is given an extended meaning, *stuprum* in casuist Latin having the meaning of fornication, by consent or force, with a virgin. The point is concerned with the compliances of a woman who lives by being amiable. She has the right to demand the price, if such is the verbal or tacit contract entered into by the parties. As a justice of the peace Tamburini would assess nights and moments; as a benevolent Jesuit, how he would be loved by those sad ladies who return from the journey to Cythera with empty hands! They ought to print his portrait with his professional opinion round it coloured like the Epinal woodcuts. There are pieties which would canonize this good man. For Tamburini only arouses laughter by his goodness and his logic. Every labour deserves its wages, says he with simplicity, and he adds: "Miserable male, you who profit by her poverty, will you add cheating to your sin and to the sin of this girl who prostitutes herself? Pay, since you have promised to pay, and, while you remain a sinner, be at least an honourable sinner."

The Jesuits were in disagreement less with the scientific spirit than with the rationalist and Protestant spirit. Upon the whole, they represent the sanest and most acceptable portion of Christianity, that which tried to accommodate its destructive principles to the necessities of life. It was possible to agree superficially with them about almost everything; to enter into conversation with a pure Christian was scarcely possible. As long as this intermediary was necessary they were rather like the plastic mediator of the old philosophy in the world; in that part, which has now become useless, the Jesuits rendered services to civilisation and the freedom of manners which should not be forgotten.

Whether the intellect is a normal product of the brain, as Taine believed, or whether it is a disease, matters little, especially since a defect which is transmitted from generation to generation finally looses its pathological characteristics; it becomes an integral and normal part of the organism. Nevertheless its accidental origin is corroborated by this: while the intellect is an excellent instrument for *a priori* combinations, it is (especially, one should say) inapt for the perception of realities. To this infirmity are due metaphysics, religions and moralities. Since the exterior world can only reach consciousness by scrupulously adopting all the folds and all the turns of the brain, it happens that when we think we have an image of the world we only have an image of ourselves. Cer-

tain corrections are possible; the analysis of the phenomena of vision has made us admit that; by the comparison of our sensations and our ideas with what we can understand of the sensations and ideas of others we succeed in determining the probable mean, but the mean is largely negative. It would be easier to draw up a list of non-truths than of truths, to assert that a religion is false no longer denotes a great boldness of mind or even very much mind; the veracity of no religion is now a matter of controversy except for the different European clergy whose living it is or for the out-of-date rationalists who, like their master Kant, are always on the look-out for the propitious and lucrative hour of opportune conversions. But to the naïve question of those minds which, like nature in the seventeenth century, abhor a vacuum: with what do you replace it? No one can reply. It suffices, and is quite a fine thing to have transmuted a truth into a non-truth. The superior occupation of criticism is not even to sow doubts, as Pierre Bayle proclaimed; we must go further, we must destroy, we must burn down. The intelligence is an excellent instrument of negation; it is time to make use of it, and to cease trying to erect palaces with picks and torches.

The history of the idea of immortality is a good example of our congenital impotence to perceive realities otherwise than reformed and reworked by the understanding. The idea of immortality was born from the belief in a double. During sleep when the body is inert there is a

part of man which moves, travels, fights, eats, enjoys or suffers, exercises all the phenomena of life; this part of man, this double of man, this astral body, survives the decomposition of the material body whose habits and needs it retains. Such no doubt is the origin of the belief in that which, since Hellenism, we call the immortality of the soul; in a more ancient stage the religion of Europe was based on the theory of the double; it was for doubles and not for souls that real food, and later on symbolical food, was placed in the tombs. But the Egyptian religion was already surcharged with the idea of justice, of balance; the doubles were weighed in the scales of good and of evil; the metaphysics of morality have obscured the primitive idea of immortality which is nothing but the pure idea of indefinite duration.

For theologians, for philosophers—if there is still one who professes these worthy doctrines—for the mass of men, the idea of immortality or of a future life is intimately bound up with the idea of justice. Eternal happiness is a compensation granted to human miseries; there are also, but only for theologians, personal tortures which are punishments for disobeying the orders of priests; and these tortures are also for the good an increase of recompense and a guarantee against promiscuity. In this there is an aristocratic selection but it is based on the idea of good and evil instead of on the idea of strength and weakness. These strange reverses of value greatly angered Nietzsche; they must be accepted at least as the transi-

tory consequences of civilised man's sensibility. Primitive man, whose nerves do not quiver much and whose intelligence is passive, does feel a deadened suffering, but he does not feel injustice, which is moral suffering. To rediscover such a state we must pass through the middle regions and question a Goethe, a Taine or a Nietzsche, men in whom the intellect by its very excess has at last conquered and repulsed the supplications of pity and the sentimental temptations of justice. If the idea of immortality had been born in a superior intellect, only by its greater logic would it have differed from the brutal conceptions of primitive humanity.

The idea of justice, being subject to the variations of sensibility, is very unstable. Most of the facts which we place to-day in the category of injustice were left by the Greeks in the category of fate; and they laboured to find remedies for others which we cast into the ditch under the name of misfortunes or fatality. When a nation reduces the category of fate to the profit of the category of injustice it is beginning to admit its own decadence; the extreme state of sensibility to injustice is shown by the gag of the Zaina, who only breathes through a veil in order not to destroy any life. This is a state of intellectual degradation towards which the humanity of Europe is moving, for the mystic vegetarians were the precursors of the sentimental socialists. Have we not already heard of our "lower brothers" and do we not hear machines praised

because they spare animals the exercise of their muscles? To weep over the slave who turns a wheel or over the poet who sings in the desert is a sign of degeneracy; for the slave turns the wheel because he loves life more than he suffers from his labour, and the poet coos in his hole like a toad because his song is an agreeable physiological exercise.

Among the emotions which resound the most surely through every fairly sensitive organism, the aesthetic emotions must be placed in the first rank. And thus they return to their origin. That which inclines to love seems beautiful; that which seems beautiful inclines to love. Here there is undeniably an interlacing. We love a woman because she is beautiful; and we think her beautiful because we love her. It is the same with everything which allows associations of sexual ideas and with all the emotions which react on the genital system. But for a work of art to awake ideas of love it is not at all necessary that it should present us with a sensual picture; it is enough for it to be beautiful, captivating. It impassions; where shall we seek the seat of that passion? The brain is only a centre of transmission; it is not a terminus. It was a happy and deserving error to have made man's brain the absolute centre of man; but it is an error. The sole natural end of man is reproduction. If there were another end to his activity he would no longer be an animal; and we fall into Christianity. Here once more are the soul, demerit, all

the jargon of the merchants of spiritual nostrums. The consciousness of emotion is elaborated at the moment when the emotion passes through it, but it only leaves its image as it passes and descends to the loins. This manner of speech is perhaps figurative and, besides, it is not a matter of intense and strongly localised excitements. It only means that aesthetic emotion places man in a state favourable to the reception of erotic emotion. This state is given to some by music, to others by painting or the drama. I know a man, elderly it is true, who could elude a sexual desire by turning over albums of engravings. The opposite case would no doubt be less paradoxical; aesthetic emotion is that from which man allows himself most easily to be distracted by love, so easy, almost inevitable, is the transition. This intimate union of art and love is, moreover, the sole explanation of art. Without it, without this genital echo, it would not have been born and would not have been perpetuated. Nothing is useless in the profound human habits; everything which has lasted is therefore necessary. Art is the accessory to love. Take love away, and there is no more art; take art away, and love is scarcely anything but a physiological need.

The reason of man in life is to be a function; his days must be the creators of a result. That is why the disappearance of the crafts into fragments through the division of labour carried to an extreme will be eternally regretted. Industrial civilisation has deprived a very large

number of men of the pleasure they found in work. High wages may mean that a man is pleased at having worked but they do not give real contentment, the joy of using the present hour for the realisation of an object. Industrialism has operated against the artizan in favour of the idler, and also in favour of capital against labour. Some mechanical discoveries have been more harmful to humanity than an age-long war. The pleasure-giving value of muscular activity has been so much diminished that the only moments when manual labourers feel their lives are those when the normal man gives way, those of rest; and necessarily they have tried to inflate those hours of negative sensation to make them the whole pleasure of living —alcohol has been the means.

To check this source of excitement, certain persons of good will but of unhealthy intelligence, that is to say without contact with reality, have thought of opposing the pleasure of learning to the pleasure of drinking. If this work were possible they would only have replaced physiological drunkenness by cerebral drunkenness; and that would not be a very good result. If an evening of intellectual labour succeeds a day of muscular labour, the total fatigue is doubled without real profit for the man subjected to this regimen. Think of the unhappy man who for ten hours has been thrusting pieces of wood under the cruel teeth of a circular saw and then, having somehow supped, goes to listen to a gentleman who discourses to him on the holiness of justice! But justice would demand

that the preacher should alternate with the artizan the moving of logs and the comfortable study of the fruitful principles of social charlatanism. Poor people, who, having always instinctively need of priests, think themselves conquerors because they have denied a dogma, and applaud the morality of this dogma deformed by hypocrisy and hatred! The clergy dominated the people and the world with the very old invention of education; and it is still with education that lay preachers mean to clip the last claws of vital instinct.

Speech is feminine. Poets and orators are feminine. To speak, is to do the work of woman. Woman, because she speaks as a bird sings, is alone capable of teaching a language. When the child tries to imitate the sounds heard, the woman is there to watch it, to smile and to encourage it; a mute contract of labour is set up between the two, and what patience in her who knows to guide the one who is trying! The first words spoken by a child do not correspond in its mind with any object, any sensation; at that moment of its life the child is a parrot and nothing more. It imitates; it speaks because it hears people speaking; if those about it were silent, speech would remain congealed in its brain. Hence the importance of woman's babbling, an importance far superior to that of the most beautiful poem and the most profound philosophies. The function which makes a man a man is the special work of woman; a child brought up by a very feminine and lo-

quacious woman is earlier formed for speech and consequently for psychological consciousness; the same child under the care of a silent man would develop very slowly, so slowly perhaps that it would never reach the limit of its practical intelligence.

Παρθένος, puella, virgo, pulcella, virgin, damsel, girl, young "lady," and all the names of this state in all languages old or new—a common and exclusive idea permits of their being translated one by another, but the translation, true for the basis of the idea, would be false for the aspect which this idea takes on according to civilisations and their periods. At present a woman of middling condition spends in the state of a young "lady" the third of her sexual life and some of the years best fitted for love, sometimes almost all of them. A girl who marries at twenty-eight has spent fourteen years in not living, for outside of love there is no life for woman. This delay between the end of education and marriage was greatly shortened in the old regime; sometimes there was none. The little girl became a woman without having ever been a young "lady". She was spared a painful transition; for it is certain that for most young "ladies" their state is a torment as soon as it is prolonged.

Yet there were young "ladies" in the past and even in the eighteenth century. Not all were married on the morrow of their nubility, torn from the convent for this new communion which confirms the first. We see some

of them pass through comedies, novels and memoirs; but their character is not easily distinguished from that of young married women. They had no prudery and sometimes very little reserve. As soon as they were admitted into society they lived its life; no care was taken to hide from them either intrigue or escapades or pleasures; they were guests waiting to be served, without impatience because they were certain of being served. Those who were forgotten served themselves, and hardly anybody was surprised. At the eve of the revolution, in those years of paradise whose pleasantness made the first dark days appear the more cruel, virginity was not highly valued; there was a universal desire to yield to nature. To-day a Casanova would only conquer women or courtezans; the young "lady" would escape him. He harmed a great number of them and that alone, a precise coincidence with the morals of the time, would assert the veracity of his admirable and delightful memoirs. A witness on a lower stage, Restif de la Bretonne, confirms this facility of girls in the eighteenth century. They gave themselves from sentiment and very quickly acquired the valuable taste for sensuality; for everything surrounding them, morals, art, literature, urged them to a pagan life enhanced by a little fanciful dreaming. The young "lady" of Laclos belongs to a society which touched the Court; she scarcely differs from that of Casanova and of Restif.

It is very evident that at that moment education possessed no serious means of restraining the young "lady".

Hence these very early marriages. The parents were glad to be freed from their responsibility, and the husbands, without any illusions about the future, married young girls to be certain of at least one or two legitimate children. This practice, while safeguarding the essential part of man's rights, respected the woman's liberty as much as it could. She was not left free, or very rarely, to choose her husband; but she chose her lover, and that at an age when it is a pure pleasure to love even more than a sexual necessity. At twenty-two or twenty-three the woman of the eighteenth century had exhausted her natural duties. She had children, often four or five; what more could be asked of her? Her husband, tired of her, left her wearied of him, with the hope of fifteen or twenty years of amorous life. At the age when a young "lady" of to-day is exhausting herself over sterile and (which is worse) stupifying studies, the woman of the past was in the full flower of maternity. In the provinces and among the strict, this flowering continued for a very long time, leaving no room for exterior pleasures for the woman, nor perhaps for the husband. Thus were produced those patriarchal families, the idea of which terrifies us, and very rightly, for social conditions no longer allow such expansion. Some provinces retained the tradition of early marriages down to the first years of this century. In my childhood I knew Mme. de L. . . . married at fourteen, and Mme. de M. . . . married at fifteen. One had had many children; the other only two. Neither could remember having been a young

"lady", and they gazed with a tender pity at their granddaughters who, at twenty and upwards, blushed at the gallant anecdotes they related without scruple. For them there had been no interregnum between the lives of the saints and fashionable novels; they had passed at one jump from the doll to the husband, from puerility to maternity. They had had the modesty of young women; the modesty of young "ladies" was entirely an enigma to them.

If the young "lady" has not done us more harm, all the harm she has done in Protestant countries, the reason is that France like Italy has a pagan tradition and a separation has taken place in our literature. With Gautier and Flaubert in the novel, with Baudelaire in poetry, a new literature was created which no longer considered the young "lady" or the family of which she had become the soul and the centre. Literature could evolve with sufficient ease if it were only asked to spare the modesty of women; but it was requested to respect the modesty of virgins. That is the origin of the revolt, and the pretext for the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin,* which is one of the finest things in free French literature. Sometimes during the last thirty years "literary" literature has skirted licentious literature. The reason is that the writer who has only a public of men feels he has a right to say anything. Those whom the young "lady" has excluded from her drawing room table (where I never see anything but flowers, cards or ornaments) have thought no more of

the hands of young women. Some have burned themselves in this hell; others have found it refreshing. There are very well behaved young women in the public for sensual literature; there are even young "ladies". Both prefer good literature which shocks their hearts a little to bad literature which, while satisfying their sensibilities, would defile their intelligence. The mind also has its modesty.

At this moment we have reached a point when everything which is not Christian seems obscene. You cannot say that wolves generally eat lambs and that it is their duty as wolves, without sending a shudder of horror through the crowd. That sort of thing must be remedied and the world must be ranged under Berquin's crook. Equity, which is order, is confounded with the Christian idea, justice. For Cicero and the jurists *justitia* was the law, the attribution to each of what is due to him; for Tertullian the word means gentleness, kindness. We have arrived at Tertullian. It is a way of feeling. It has its value. Only, those who repeat "Blessed are the meek" and who practise the gospel of pity are destined to become the slaves of those who dare to say "My justice is my strength", and who prove it. They are so already. I quite understand that those who are the weak should wish to become the strong; but the opposite revolts me as a cowardice. I do not like the Roman patricians who joined the religion of the slaves, they were the apostates of their caste and their

race. In France as soon as the military aristocracies had received a certain amount of culture, as soon as they understood the meaning of the Christian prayers, they refused to utter them and left a religion of humility to the people. The Christian orators of the seventeenth century came from the people; their occupation was to convert the great; each was the Saint Remi to some Clovis. The great Condé long resisted; one day when Bourdaloue entered the pulpit at Saint-Sulpice, he exclaimed: "Silence, here is the enemy!" This anecdote is always quoted in honour of Bourdaloue. So be it; but it establishes very well also the attitude of a Condé to a Jesuit.

To-day the intellectual aristocracy can be judged by the same touchstone. It is incompatible, I do not say merely with faith, but with Christian sentimentality. We must live above that and not be concerned with the happiness of others when we disdain our own. Christianity has promulgated a unique morality, obligatory for all. Those who seem most violent against Christianity take the greatest care to respect this morality; rather than lighten it, they would gladly make it heavier. People must be happy, and it is obedience which leads men by the hand towards happiness. Thus humanity sacrifices everything which is not essential to the middling ideal it wishes to attain. The first sacrifice is that of liberty. To think according to the orders of a religious or of a political director—what does that matter to the people, who do not think? To submit; what does that matter to the masses

who already live in slavery? The choice of pleasures; they are already used to undergoing it. Who understands the joy of raising oneself through a difficult act? Middling happiness puts aside everything which might make human life less ugly; and it includes everything which lowers it. The terrestrial ideal of humanity smells of the pigsty, as its celestial ideal smelt of the stable. Neither the Christian paradise nor the socialist paradise can suit the superior portion of humanity. Men worthy of the name know only one manner of exercising life—by the struggle for liberty.

Nevertheless the world is Christian and becomes more Christian every day. Those who cut themselves off from the communion and admit their unbelief will have to resign themselves to an inharmonious and painful life. Those who do not conform will be more and more flouted and hated. Their position will become more difficult than the position of unbelievers during the reign of faith. Already we have to use artifice to express our thoughts when it wounds Christian morality.

Nothing wounds a civilised man so much as the denial of his free will.

The three masters of the intelligence in the sixteenth century evolved above religion. Neither Erasmus nor Rabelais nor Montaigne took part in the quarrels of the

Reformation. It all happened beneath their feet, as if in the passages of an ant-hill.

The Jesuit is an optimist by nature. His end is happiness. He believes in it and wants it, not only after death, but this very day. The happiness he pursues and attains is a passive happiness; the abandonment of will. Hence his obedience.

For a normal mind there are no cases of conscience, neither the idea of duty nor of remorse.

Christianity is a machine for creating remorse, because it is a machine for diminishing the subtlety, and for restraining the spontaneity, of vital reactions. . . . What a triumph for the Jews to have forged for the multitude of Philistines such an instrument of degeneration!

Protestantism is a reaction against freedom of living, which is an essential condition for freedom of thought.

A liberal Protestant cannot imagine to what extent, when viewed in the light of a laboratory, he resembles a Jesuit or a Capuchin.

To assert moral truth can only be a theological gesture. Kantism is a Christian heresy and has retained and reinforced the essential characteristics of Christianity. With-

out a moral god, that is, one free and conscious, there is no human morality except empirically. Morality is either the expression of the will of the absolute or it is nothing or it is a code of customs. Set God aside and morality falls, like court ceremonial at the fall of a monarchy.

The human mind is so complex and things are so interlaced that, to explain a blade of grass, the whole universe would have to be taken to pieces; and there is not a genuine word in any language whereon a lucid intelligence cannot build a treatise of psychology, a history of the world, a novel, a poem, a drama, according to the day and the degree of the temperature.

It becomes certain that human intelligence, far from being the object of creation, is only an accident, and that moral ideas are merely vegetable parasites born from an excess of nutrition.

The physical laws which scientists promulgate or observe are admissions of ignorance. When we cannot explain a mechanism, we assert that its movements occur by virtue of a law. Bodies fall by virtue of the law of gravity; that is the serious equivalent to the comic "dormative virtue".

All progress ends by denying itself; having reached its

maximum expansion it tends to reestablish the primitive state for which it was substituted.

Beauty is so certainly sexual that the only undisputed works of art are those which show the human body in its nudity. By its perseverence in remaining purely sexual, Greek sculpture placed itself for all eternity above dispute. It is beautiful because it is a beautiful human body, like that with which every man or every woman would wish to unite to perpetuate themselves according to their race.

THE PROBLEM OF STYLE

[LE PROBLEME DU STYLE]

1902

WITHOUT visual memory, without the reservoir of images where imagination dips for new and infinite combinations, there is no style, no artistic creation. That alone permits us not only to paint the different movements of life by means of verbal figures, but to transform immediately into visions every association of words, every worn metaphor, even every isolated word, in short, to give life to death. From this power came allegories, such as *The Shepherd of Hermas,* the *Consolation of Philosophy,* the *Vita Nuova,* the *Roman de la Rose,* the *Palace of Divine Love;* the style of Michelet and of Taine are the product of this very happy faculty for changing the abstract into the concrete, for making the very stone breathe and "the stars palpitate". Language is full of

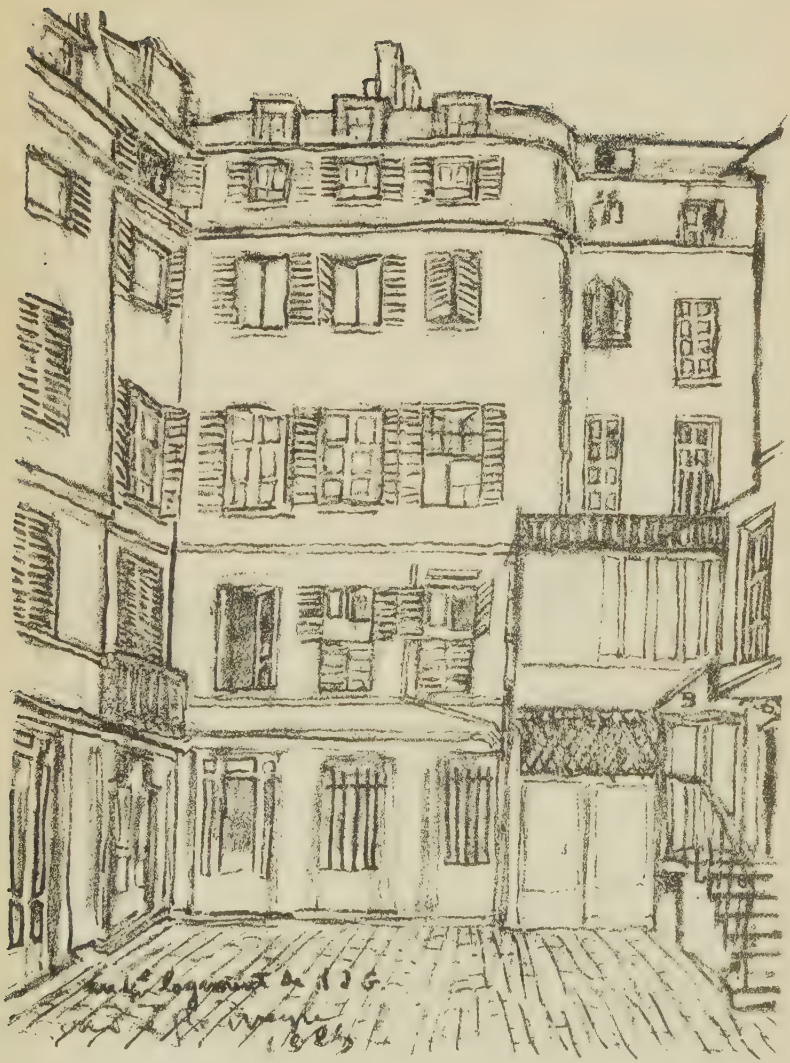
clichés which were originally bold images, happy discoveries of the metaphorical power. All abstract words are the figuration of a material act; pondering is weighing. . . . In speech everything is images; the smoothest discourse is a tissue of more rugged metaphors than a page of Goncourt or of Saint-Pol-Roux. They have been called worn coins; and that is almost true. But whether worn or new, they are coins; with an obverse which is the meaning at departure, and a reverse which is the meaning at arrival. There are obverses and reverses so outworn that the most tyrannical imagination can no longer animate them. Nevertheless many of those who make use of these coins from preference also make use of their eyes at least to classify the drab verbal riches heaped up in their memories. At the mention of the word "ocean" instead of a glacous immensity or a shore of sand or cliffs or any similar vision rising before them, they see—admirable simplification!—the word itself written in space in printed letters, OCEAN. More advanced intellectually than the visuals, these privileged individuals are grouped at the negative pole of the magnet whose positive pole is occupied by the artists.

The writer with an abstract style is almost always a sentimentalist, at least a sensitive. The artist-writer is hardly ever a sentimental and very rarely a sensitive; that is to say, he incorporates all his sensibility in his style, and has very little left for life and the profound passions. The one

takes a ready-made phrase or writes a facile phrase wherein, deceived by his own emotion, he thinks there is an emotive value; the other takes words which are merely handfuls of clay, constructs the limbs of his work and erects a statue which whether beautiful or ugly, heavy or winged, will yet keep in its attitude some of the life which animated the hands by which it was moulded. Nevertheless the vulgar will feel more emotion from the banal phrase than from the original phrase; and this will be the counter-proof: to the reader who draws his emotions from the very substance of what he reads is opposed the reader who only feels what he reads to the extent that he can apply it to his own life, to his griefs, to his hopes. He who enjoys the literary beauty of a sermon by Bossuet cannot be touched by it religiously, and he who weeps for the death of Ophelia has no aesthetic sense. These two parallel categories of writers and readers constitute the two great types of cultivated humanity. In spite of shades and over-lappings, no understanding is possible between them; they despise each other, for they do not understand each other. Their animosity extends in two wide, sometimes subterranean, streams throughout literary history.

Like all the writers of his time and before it and even after it, Flaubert underwent the initial influence of Chateaubriand; which is neither miraculous nor very important. Starting from any other school Flaubert would similarly have become what he was, himself. Life is a

process of stripping. The end of a man's own activity is to clean his personality, to wash from it all the stains left on it by education, to free it from all the imprints imposed on it by adolescent admirations. A time comes when the scoured coin is clean and shining with its own metal. But, following another image, I think of the stripping of wine which, freed from its disturbed particles, its vain vapours, its false colours, one day becomes gay with all its grace, proud with all its strength, limpid and smiling like a new rose. Since Flaubert is one of the most profoundly personal writers that ever existed, one of those who may be read most clearly through the lace of style, it is easy to follow in his work the progressive stripping of the man. To do that, you must read successively *Madame Bovary, L'Education Sentimentale, Bouvard et Pécuchet;* only in this last book is the work completed, only there does the man's genius appear in all its transparent beauty. The few phrases where he imitates Chateaubriand through having read him too much and having carried him too long in his veins—what a little thing is such an epic! The most admired books of Flaubert to-day, *La Tentation* and *Salambo* (an endowment which would yet suffice for two great writers), are the least pure and the least beautiful. The only books are those where a writer has related himself by relating the morals of his contemporaries, their dreams, their vanities, their loves and their follies. What are the descriptions of *Salambo* and their long cadenced phrases compared with the brief notations



and abridgements of *Bouvard and Pécuchet,* that book which is only comparable with *Don Quixote,* which amuses us as the novel of Cervantes amused the seventeenth century, and which, when the familiar period is over, will remain the archives where posterity will clearly read the hopes and vexations of a century? And the soul of a man too. This book is so personal, so woven as it were from nervous fibres that no one has ever been able to add to it a page which did not produce the effect of a piece of cloth on a tulle dress. The miracle is that this work of flesh seems wholly spiritual. At first it seems like a catalogue of little experiments which any laborious man could easily complete; it cannot be touched; it is a living animal which squirms and cries as soon as the needle is plunged into it to make the join. All Flaubert seems impersonal. It has become a proverb. As if a great writer, as if a man with a strong, excessive dominating, extravagent sensibility could be—what? the contrary of the one word which can define him! An impersonal work of art, an impersonal work of science! If ever I have been guilty of such an abuse of words, may I be pardoned. It was from ignorance. But now I know that only mediocre works are impersonal, and that there is more personality in Claude Bernard's *Leçons de Physiologie Expérimentale* than in the *Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle.* There is not such and such a kind of art; there is not science on one side and literature on the other; there are brains which function well and brains which function badly.

Flaubert incorporated all his sensibility in his works; and by sensibility I mean, here as everywhere, the general power of feeling such as it is unequally developed in every human being. Sensibility includes reason itself, which is only crystalized sensibility. Outside his books, wherein he transfused himself drop by drop to the dregs, Flaubert is not very interesting; he is nothing but dregs; his intelligence is disturbed, exasperated to an incoherent fantasy. He, whose written irony is duped by no social pretence, no mask, no dream, allowed himself to be taken in by false talents and false loves; he rolled in poetic sentimentality or howled stupid insults against the middle class. Far from his work being impersonal, the parts are here reversed; the man is vague and made up of incoherences, while the work lives, breathes, suffers and smiles nobly.

I do not condemn the imaginary notation of things "not seen." Art must not be limited to the immediate data of the senses. The imagination is richer than the memory but it is only richer with the new combinations it imposes on the elements furnished it by the memory. To imagine is to associate images and fragments of images; that is not creating. Man cannot create either an atom of matter or an atom of idea. All imaginative literature then, like positive literature, and like science itself, rests on reality. But it is freed from all care for absolute exactitude, is subject only to that relative exactitude which is general logic, and the laws of general logic are sufficiently subtle for us to

admit the *Divine Comedy* or *Gulliver's Travels*. The methods of illusion of Dante and Swift are very different from those of Homer; nevertheless these great poets have conquered the approbation and admiration of human generations.

I think that art from its essence is absolutely unintelligible to the people. Whether it is Racine or Mallarmé, Raphael or Claude Monet, the people cannot understand artistically either a poem or a picture because the people is not disinterested and art is disinterestedness. For the people everything is in the subject of the picture and the poem; for "the intellectual" everything is in the manner in which the subject is treated. The people stops before Greuze's *Happy Family* (or some imbecility of that kind); but he who loves painting wishes that the Greuzes were turned towards the wall because they annoy his eye which is amused by a pot or a cauldron of Chardin. All those who wander in museums are able to make such observations; a chance visitor never utters a word which betrays an art sensation; what tickles the worthy man or the young "lady" is the anecdote, the maternal or amorous gesture, the pretty dress, the noble cry of bravery uttered in the smoke by the man with a plume; in poetry it is the anecdote and sentiment; poetry which is not lyric; the poetry which tells stories is the only poetry which has ever been popular in any country.

Therefore, relative to the people, it is quite indifferent whether a work of art is obscure or luminous, because the people will never judge it as a work of art but only as a dramatic work, as a work representative of an action. The people understands the act expressed or does not understand it; if it understands, it accepts or rejects for reasons which have nothing to do with art, since art, indifferent to acts, is only interested in the manner in which the act is simulated. Pigs at a trough can make a work of art very superior (I think this is indisputable) to certain frames wherein the freshest flowers blossom; do not put an uneducated man to choose between these two canvases; if, like Tolstoy, you believe in the artistic infallibility of the people, you may be disappointed.

Therefore the people must be left aside; the people is not made for art nor art for the people. The people does not enjoy the exception and, I maintain, art is a perpetual exception.

Greek beauty itself is displeasing when admired too closely. Passionate admiration tends to realize, that is to say, to copy; and thus artistic erudition and museums corrupt the artless taste of a race. Copying is so tempting to idleness, it is so restful a form of activity! The nineteenth century did nothing else in the decorative arts; it is to be hoped that, after a few labourious attempts it will not take as its motto the last words of *Bouvard et Pécuchet:* "And they returned to their copying." Even to-day unfor-

tunately many worthy and sensible people think that an armchair in the imitation Louis XV style is more "artistic" than a simple rush-bottom chair, and it would be difficult to undeceive them. In the distant provinces there are chair-makers capable of making a rush-bottom chair which could be described perhaps as naïve art. The copy, even when cunning, is never art. The copy of a beautiful thing is always an ugly thing. It is an act of cowardice in admiration of an act of energy.

Perhaps at last it has been discovered that good books are irrefutable and that bad books refute themselves.

It is as absurd to seek the truth—and to find it—when we have reached the age of reason, as to put our shoes in the hearth on Christmas eve.

Truth tyrannizes; doubt liberates.

We write as we feel, as we think, with the whole of our bodies.

I have not noticed that the books which nobody reads are more absurd than those which everybody reads.

A writer when he is writing should never think of his masters or even of his style. If he sees, if he feels, he will say something; it may be interesting or not, beautiful or

mediocre, the risk must be taken. . . . Style is feeling, seeing, thinking, and nothing more.

The *Song of Roland* is not a poem, it is life fixed, arrested, not in space but in time; it is not art, it is crude reality with lights, movements, projections, shadows.

The art of describing is the art of seeing, the art of feeling with all one's organs, with every fibre of the nerves.

A fool, however able he may be in aping talent, never has style; he only pretends he has.

A book which the veneration of ages has made sacred is no longer a book; it is a part of nature. We read it like a landscape, like a city, and we feel in it what we are capable of feeling.

The art of writing, which can only be the art of writing in the fashion of the day, is too changeable to be taught.

You can keep much closer to nature in general language than in technical language, and moreover you make yourself much better understood.

Voltaire is not simple; simplicity is not the vice of witty people.

Nothing perishes more quickly than style unsupported by the solidity of vigourous thought.

The sign of the man in an intellectual work is the thought. The thought is the man himself. Style is thought itself.

It seems as if in proportion to the decline of public interest in poetry the poets become more numerous and more daring.

. . . Every original genius is at first ignored or opposed by the mass of his contemporaries, at the same time that he is adored in a conventicle which gradually becomes the universal Church. In a democratic country one enters directly into fame, and the more cultivated the country is, the more widespread its average education, the harder it is to cut a way through the wall of indifference.

The timid learned get used to everything, even to genius. . . .

What we call primitive art is on the contrary an art of extreme civilisation, since it is both stylised and symmetrical.

Think of the time wasted by poor children in learning by heart rules and exceptions which will never be of any use to them! Imagine creatures who should be taught cooking and all its secrets at length when they were fated to live on bacon and soup.

EPILOGUES: FIRST SERIES

[EPILOGUES: PREMIER SERIE]

1903

WHEN its theology is known there is nothing important in a religion but its folklore; its traditional superstitions, the surprises of its liturgy, its religious stories, the legendary lives of its saints and martyrs, all the popular part of a religion, everything which makes a religion living and tenacious. Neither the belief in one God nor morality makes the true foundation of religion. A religion, even Christianity, never had more than a dilatory influence on morals, the influence of a lifted arm; it must recommence its preaching not only with every human generation, but with every phase of an individual life. Bringing no truths evident in themselves, when its teaching is forgotten, it leaves in souls nothing but the dread of the "perhaps" and the shame of having

been enslaved by a fear or a hope whose phantom chains fetter, not our acts, but our desires. Nor is monotheism a conquest—or a religious discovery; religions, and especially Catholicism, surround this faith with so many accessories that the adventitious beliefs become objections against the dogma itself. The essence of a religion is its literature, and religious literature is dead.

It is not their fault—whose fault is it?—if there is today such discord between art and morality, that what is beautiful is rarely moral and what is moral is rarely beautiful.

It must be repeated, even if a hundred thousand times, that criticism must be positive and explanatory. Those who love and not those who hate are to speak; those who understand and not those who do not understand.

Is there no country where in their turn the robbers imprison the honest people, the sinister honest people—those first of all—who urge the people to generation and childbirth? Every one knows that there is less work than workers, less food than human beings, fewer tools than arms, less bread than mouths, and, knowing that, everybody cries: make children! Yes, make children, make thieves, make assassins, prostitutes, convicts, a mob for the jail and the barracks.

Women are always a hundred years behind the times.

At the moment when men, having become at last a little clear-sighted and sceptical, begin to disdain their illusory rights, to pass with a smile by walls dirtied with democratic prose, and moreover to think themselves incapable of finding a difference between Mr. Dupont and Mr. Durand, wanting to become almost men again instead of poor duped citizens; then women and children want to turn the handle in their turn.

But it might be terrible. Women are reactionary and they would have the majority. In certain states of North America where they have control they have closed the cabarets, the bars, the cafés, the clubs and the theatres. Being Biblical, they have ordered the strict observance of the Sabbath, forbidden balls, gambling and wicked morals. Everything is overlooked by an immense police force. To obtain a grog—even an American one—you need a doctor's prescription and the manipulations of the apothecary, who alone may sell alcoholic poisons. It is the middle ages of legend; it would be an Opera Bouffe, if it were not hell. Thus they have obtained an ideal society where everything is sacrificed to the family, to the woman, to the child—a perfectly theoretical society, for the Anglo-Saxon is hypocritical and nobody, not even his wife, can prevent him from getting drunk in his own home, but it is a legal society which has terrified European travellers.

From a distance it seems rather ridiculous.

Nobody thinks of pointing out that the increase of

crimes and misdemeanours is due perhaps to the simultaneous perfecting of statistics and justice, especially of justice which becomes more and more harsh, oppressive and pitiless. First of all, every parliamentary session creates five or six new misdemeanours and in twenty years, with the gracious help of the Socialists, the number of forbidden acts in France will be so enormous that complete ataraxia will be imposed on the terrorized generations. Meanwhile the magistrates, happy to justify their functions, but urged on by the police often beyond their strength and their lucidity, sequestrate, condemn, imprison. They apply the law; it is the Law which must be reviled, the Law and those who fabricate it, retouch it, tighten its meshes by an incessant stupid and mischievous labour. One of the most scandalous abuses of the Code is the infinity of petty punishments, those two and four days of prison which strangle a man for you with hypocritical certainty; the invention is due to a philanthropic imbecile, Beccaria; it has slain more wretches than the ravens of Montfaucon ever tore limbs. The graduation of punishments makes the condemnation of every accused person almost certain; that is why when criminality is talked of, it would be good to point out the reasons for the condemnations instead of limiting oneself to fallacious additions. "There are the figures . . .", says indignant Virtue, and a magistrate writes an article where he asks: what can be the attraction of prisons when thousands of the poor voluntarily enter them by well-calculated thefts or small misdemean-

ours? The attraction, he knows, is that in prison a man eats, has a bed, etc. The army of malefactors, apart from a few irreducible anthropoids, is chiefly made up of the poor; criminality is the pseudonym of hunger. Neither morality, nor religion, nor education can have any influence on hunger; and their influence would be very abominable if it inclined to resignation the wretches who suffer unjustly.

The League for Repopulation has just drawn up an important bill under the provisions of which no one will be able to fill any function of the State unless he is the legitimate father of three or four children! Morality united to patriotism is not infertile; it is even a spectacle of eternal procreation; their family of little monsters is innumerable and prosperous; but could we have hoped that so stupid and so shameful a product would have been brought into the world? It is really pleasant to be the contemporary of people who proclaim: We will choose the captains of our ships not from the most experienced and bravest sailors, but from those who have fruitfully lain with their wives. Renan was right; human stupidity is the one thing which gives an idea of infinity.

There is no point in enquiring whether England is in a state of progress or of decadance. The words have no meaning. A nation never perishes by itself, by a slow death, by self-poisoning; at the moment when the Roman

Empire began to sink, it was the most powerful, the most vast and the sole great Empire in the world. In the Brazilian forests an army of tiny ants attacks, conquers, gnaws and denudes in a few hours a prodigious snake capable of crushing a bull. The English are, because they are permitted to be. No European nation exists on other terms, and none, however strong it may appear, knows whether it is on the eve of the final cataclysm. But that also is of small importance. There is no glory in being English, or in being French or in being German. Let us concern ourselves with each isolated creature and with each one of ourselves in particular; let us make ourselves free under the yokes which life imposes on us; let us be proud; and let us smile when it is proposed to us that we should be a better nation, to us who, disliking the shameful state of citizens, have no wish save to be men.

There is much hatred of liberty. People do not like others who dare to enjoy the licenses they refuse themselves, from cowardice, from fear of public opinion, from care not to damage the scenery of painted paper in which men live imprisoned by each other. We should claim liberty of morals like all other liberties, the liberty they had in old France or in Venice or in Papal Rome. Since the abdication of Italy between the hands of the Sardinian barbarians, they have tried to make morality reign there too, and the naked statues of the museums have been dressed in zinc gauze. If all intelligent and free people

do not protest against the present tendencies, in ten years the Louvre will be dishonoured by Huguenot modesty; the Antiope will be under a green veil and the Venus of Arles will be under a serge petticoat; then the sillies, the Genevans and the young "ladies" of the upper middle classes will be able to frequent that receptacle without danger for their nights. The situation is becoming serious. Under a new law books are at the mercy of a denunciation; the moralists will have a year to meditate their applications and to choose their victims; no bookseller will be safe from the hatred of his colleagues; no painter will know whether the nude bather he shows will not lead him to prison. Tomorrow they will begin to hunt ideas; for the Senators know that an idea of liberty is still more immoral and much more dangerous than a golden spot on a naked belly.

The citizen is an admirable being. Every treatise boasts his virtues and his abnegation, adding: "Besides he only does his duty." With that word Duty, the citizen is made to dance like a bear with a bagpipe. He dances, he collapses through having danced with an empty stomach and as he dies exclaims: "I have done my duty!" This poor animal, which never receives anything but blows when it does not dance in tune, is an eternal debtor; he always owes and he always gives, without ever getting clear. His death is infinite; even death does not extinguish it; the son finds it in the heritage from his father. He lives without hope; he knows he will never become a man.

The fundamental characteristics of the citizen are therefore devotion, resignation and stupidity; he principally exercises these qualities according to three physiological functions, as a reproductive animal, as an electing animal, as a tax-paying animal.

"Charming Tsar, in your own home you will see the Revolution, stupid as the people and ferocious as the bourgeoisie; you will see it, exceeding in animality and bloody rapacity everything you have been allowed to read in the expurgated volumes which made your education. You will see the Russian delirium unchain itself without your permission and howl under your windows that Marseillaise you hum in the family circle round the samovar. Read the *Prophecy of Cazotte;* it is still up to date and if it had not already been fulfilled once, it might have been written yesterday on the back of your portrait. Think of Siberia and think of Tolstoy. Siberia is a Bastille, a little larger, a little more peopled than the harmless prison which exasperated the Parisians a century ago; it is a more certain exile, a more profound dungeon, but sometimes shrieks and sometimes men come from it; shrieks and men make a revolution in less time than is needed to organise at Cronstadt the fairy show of popular enthusiasm. Think of Tolstoy, those near him live in expectation of an order to set out for the mines, but you will not give the expected order; you cannot violate civilisation; there are holes in the walls of your palace, you are watched,

it is known what you read and what you sign, the number of the prison gangs and the names of the condemned; you will keep Tolstoy and you will pretend to love him. The Revolution will gnaw at your heart and you will smile to the tune of the Marseillaise."

The French Revolution, without meaning to do so, has created two things: militarism and the aristocracy of money; it has restored one: religion. During the whole eighteenth century no monk, no priest needed to throw his gown out of the window; the rank of Benedictine monk was compatible with that of an adventurer, and that of an ecclesiastic with that of a libertine. Nobody was shocked when Cardinal Bernis in the midst of a conclave wrote to Voltaire his impressions on the powerlessness of the Holy Ghost; a celebrated preacher of those times earned his living for thirty years by preaching in the churches of Paris without ever mentioning the name of Jesus Christ, and as those who frequented sermons only did so as a social obligation, it is not thought that they ever noticed it. The religious idea has made terrible progress in the last century and a half; a priest sees himself forced to leave the church as soon as he has ceased to believe! Nowadays do we see an Abbé Goujet say his mass at Saint-Sulpice in the morning and have a ballet danced at the Opera in the evening? The function of priest seems incompatible with any other; we are severe for his morals with an exaggeration which, by accident, is not hypocritical; we de-

mand particular virtues of him and we do not give him credit for the common virtues; we scorn him when he is ambitious, we disdain him when he is modest. His is a rank which needs heroism, even if intelligence is not necessary; the clergy too has been militarised and, as in the army, the person is confounded with the office.

The public exacts a great deal from the ordinary ecclesiastics; their superiors only ask of them one thing, just as in the army, obedience. The clergy is obedient; that is why its influence is almost nil. The only serious influence is that which is voluntary and born from personal initiative; the influence of duty is like electric heat, it does not radiate.

M. de Maupassant was a fertile writer; amusing although monochord, agreeable in spite of bitterness and a very cold irony. His simple, clear, sober, fluid style never surprised and never discouraged anyone. His novels have been read; perhaps some of them will be re-read; there are some which are perfect in their carefully traditional, perpetually Voltairean form. *Boule de Suif* was long considered a masterpiece; it is most skilfully managed and still arouses the admiration of connoisseurs. The true Maupassant was entirely spontaneous; as soon as he lost his fear of Flaubert he followed his own genius, which advised him against over-meditated labours and too purposeful writing. He did well. A man should always fol-

low his genius. Gifted with a single faculty, story-telling, he told stories without ever stopping to reflect.

M. Taine, who was a great intelligence, was one of the men of his age who seemed to emit the falsest ideas and the most venturesome judgments. His penetrating mind, as if armed with a steel point, entered into questions and ripped them up in the manner of those insects which hollow all the sap wood of an oak with winding paths. Then he related everything he had seen in his exploration; he had not seen everything, but sometimes he had guessed everything. I remember having been very much scandalised at reading in one of his books that it was an immense advantage for the modern individual to belong to one of the great European nations; it seemed to me that he had forgotten that in return for the protection they offer their members the great nations impose sacrifices on them and demand services which nothing can counter-balance. For example, they impose upon them a noisy, blind and continual hatred or a disorderly love for another nation, according to the chance of battles and diplomacies; they make upon them the dreadful exaction of military service under conditions of duration and barbarity which are giving the European the soul and attitude of a beaten dog; and finally, as the consequence of a slavery, consented to with joy, with howls, they take upon themselves the pure and simple right of life and death over all the males they control. This obligation to spend in prison three or four

of the best years of life, the most useful years for intellectual culture, has created in the man who is a victim to it such a state of inferiority that, but for the power of custom and certain legal restrictions he could no longer compete with women in the liberal or commercial careers. Three years of absence and one year to regain a little intellectual lucidity make more time than is needed by a woman with a natural genius for intrigue to obtain for herself a practice as a doctor and, tomorrow, as a lawyer; that is why there is now a project for suppressing the reprieve or commutation of penalty hitherto accorded to several categories of students. Perhaps such favours are illegitimate, but why give privileges to women, even after having excluded them, sometimes inhumanly, from certain offices or certain occupations? A social state has to protect weakness when it has wasted its strength; it is the first hour of decline, of falling and of disappearing.

In the time when Taine wrote there were still some continental countries, some small countries, where men could dispose freely of their lives. Tomorrow there will not be one and Taine will be right; when all the Belgians are soldiers there will be no advantage (it was the only one) in being a Belgian; and it does not seem to me excessive to assert that in case of war there will be less insecurity under the French flag than between the paws of the Belgium lion. For Belgium is beginning to get drunk at the dirty cask of militarism, and Holland, already intoxicated, claims almost unanimously the formula

or modern slavery: "Equal military service for all!" In this ancient land of liberty only the Catholic party has protested, not without a certain disgust; it has taken as the text for its polemics these words, which are a principle: "No man should be a soldier by force." The others have arguments, the most curious of which is that the consequence of the reform will be a raising of the intellectual and moral level of the troops; it is more probable that in Holland, as everywhere else, it will only succeed in brutalising the nation, by inculcating in all men the taste for obedience and passivity. At bottom it is the triumph of German influence and of the Prussian motto: "Serve, pay and be silent."

The excessive and exclusive love for one country has as its immediate corollary the horror of foreign countries. Not only are men afraid to leave their mothers' apron-strings, to go and see how other men live, to mingle in their struggles, to share their labours; not only do they stay at home; they end up by closing their doors. In France we have reached so acute a stage of the nationalist crisis that propositions tending to expel or to starve foreign labourers, by refusing them work, are seriously discussed in the press. Men of the importance of M. Barrés take pleasure in propagating such ideas, and parliament decides that a man must be French to have the honour of digging holes in French ground. Similarly the Socialists insinuate that the right of howling from midday to three o'clock on the steps of the Bourse should be reserved for electors only.

This madness has attacked certain men of letters, and a professor who has just been lecturing on the Cid or Don Juan writes graceful insults against Ibsen and the (alas! illusory) influence of his work, which yet is one of beauty and light!

The nationalist is inclined to a very special brand of silliness. He cannot understand that the other European nations are also attacked by patriotic vanity. He is proud when French cruisers are called Bouvines, Magenta, Solferino; but if the English call their boats Agincourt or Trafalgar, the nationalist comes near to seeing a provocation in it. "When will they have Waterloo?" he cries. And why not? Give us time to reflect a little and to ask ourselves whether Waterloo was not a benefit to the whole world and to France first of all.

The Chinese, whom I like very much, give me a great deal of anxiety, for I am afraid this admirable race will lose its fine and insolent originality by contact with Europeans. It is unfortunately probable that Chinese civilisation is over; like ancient Egyptian civilisation, with which it has some resemblance, it will disappear but not without having given the world a few good lessons of contempt, of intellectualism and of beauty. Rather than be brutalised by military exercises the Chinese will allow themselves to die as a nation, but nothing can conquer them as a race. They have been well called the Yellow Ants, the numberless tribe which renders all arms inoffensive.

Against four hundred millions of men determined not to defend themselves, war is impossible because it is useless. Engineers will go there to dig mines and to lay rails, but the mines will be Chinese and the railways will be Chinese. Nothing can prevent the future railway stations of Yu-Nam-Fou from having roofs with turned-up edges. Perhaps the Chinese will even realise Victor Hugo's dream and will give their locomotives the form of a flying dragon? This race of artists is capable of imposing on the products of our industrialism the form of beauty we are impotent to discover. The ruin of the Chinese Empire will perhaps be the beginning of Chinese influence. Some civilisations must die in order to reign.

Railways and large ocean liners could now be handled and exploited with almost complete security, but the demon of rapidity intervenes, whispers disturbing words and man casts into the fire of his machine the fatal shovelfull of coal which must inevitably lead him to death. This aberration is the price of progress. It is as if the matter of progress were unstretchable and as if it could only be drawn to one side to expose a naked surface on the other. In other words it seems as if all progress is inevitably compensated by retrogression; is it not a commonplace to say "What is gained in speed is lost in safety"? This aphorism, which is naïve because it is so evident, is applicable to all sorts of actions; and, in the end, no doubt the notion of progress is only an illusion. To keep it

intact (which, I think, is necessary) it must be identified with the idea of novelty. The new is always better because it is the new, and that is all. History is full of anecdotes which confirm this rather sceptical view; thus brown bread has become a luxury bread now that white bread has become common; linen was a great progress, it replaced wool, but now the doctors advise a return to wool; it is agreed that those who cannot eat meat are unfortunate, and yet there is a tendency to-day to consider meat as a poison; for a long time people boasted the benefits of the Renaissance which Latinised French literature, and now they think of getting rid of Latin; not long ago alcohol was looked on as a sort of food, "a thrifty form of nourishment," and now it has become the Accursed. A very long and very unhealthy litany of these anecdotes might be made, but what is the use of discouraging fervour? Have I not recently read an analysis of the Calas case which left me very perplexed about his innocence and Voltaire's good faith? Blessed are the simple, blessed are they that believe! Alas! I only think that everything is possible and that we can at once believe everything and doubt everything.

University degrees were invented in order to people France with persons looking as if they had studied.

PHYSICAL LOVE

[PHYSIQUE DE L'AMOUR]

1903

A FEW moralists have pretended to talk of love according to natural laws. But they were profoundly ignorant of these natural laws, like Senancour, whose book, though deformed by ideology still remains the boldest which has been written on a subject which nothing can render banal since it is essential. If Senancour had been aware of the science of his time, if he had only read Réaumur and Bonnet, Buffon and Lamarck, if he had dared to integrate in one another the idea of man and the idea of animal he might, since his was a mind without irreducible prejudices, have composed a work which would still be read. The moment would have been appropriate. The exact habits of animals were beginning to be known; Bonnet had established bold comparisons between carnal and vegetable generation; the essentials

of the best years of life, the mose useful years for intellectual culture, has created in the man who is a victim to it such a state of inferiority that, but for the power of cus- of physiology had been discovered; the science of life was clear since it was brief; a theory might have been attempted of psychological unity in the animal series.

Such a work would have spared many follies to the century which was then beginning. People would have grown accustomed to think of human love as only one of the innumerable forms, perhaps not the most curious, adopted by the universal instinct of reproduction, and its apparent anomalies would have met with a normal explanation in the very extravagances of nature. Darwin arrived and inaugurated a useful method, but his views are too systematic, his object too explanatory, his scale of beings with man at the top as the sum of the universal effort is too theologically simple. Man is not at the summit of nature; he is in nature, one of the unities of life, and nothing more. He is the product of a partial evolution and not the product of total evolution; the branch where he flourishes springs, like thousands of other branches, from a common trunk. Moreover Darwin was subject to the religious prudery of his race and almost entirely neglected the strict sexual facts, which renders incomprehensible his theory of sexual selection as the principle of change. But even if he had taken into consideration the mechanism of love his conclusions might have been more logical but would none the less have been in-

exact, for if sexual selection has an object it can only be that of conservation. Fecundation is a reintegration of differentiated elements into one unique element; it is a perpetual return to unity.

There is not a single method of action in the instinctive man which cannot be found in some animal species; and this is easily comprehensible, because man is an animal subject to the same essential instincts which govern all animality, because everywhere there is the same matter animated by the same desire—to live, to perpetuate life. The superiority of man lies in the immense diversity of his aptitudes. While animals are reduced to a series of gestures ever the same, man varies his mimicry to infinity; nevertheless the object is the same and the result is the same—copulation, fecundation, birth.

From the diversity of human aptitudes, from the power which man possesses of reaching the necessary end of his activity by all sorts of different paths or of eluding this end and of slaying in himself the species he carries, the belief in liberty was born. This is an illusion which it is difficult not to have, and an idea which must be set aside if we wish to think in a manner which is not wholly unreasonable; but it is certain that in fact the multiplicity of possible activities is almost equivalent to liberty. No doubt the strongest motive always wins; but the strongest to-day will be the weakest tomorrow, whence a variety in human behaviour which simulates liberty and which, practically,

has almost similar results. Free will is nothing else than the faculty of being determined successively by a very great number of very different motives. As soon as choice is possible there is liberty, although the act chosen may be rigorously determined and although it may be impossible that it should not take place. Animals have less liberty and it is the more limited because their aptitudes are more limited; but as soon as there is life there is liberty. From this point of view the distinction between man and the animals is one of quantity, not of quality. We must not allow ourselves to be duped by the scholastic distinction between instinct and intelligence: man is as filled with instinct as the most visibly instinctive insect; he obeys it by more diverse methods, that is all.

If it is clear that man is an animal, it is also clear that he is an animal of extreme complexity. In him are found most of the aptitudes which exist in animals in the state of unity. There is scarcely one of his habits, one of his virtues, one of his vices (to employ the usual words), which may not be observed here or there in an insect, a bird or a mammal—monogamy and its consequences, adultery, polygamy, polyandry; lasciviousness, idleness, activity, cruelty, courage, devotion, are all common in animals but with them it qualifies the whole species. In the state of differentiation reached by the individuals of the superior and cultivated human species, each individual certainly forms a separate variety determined by what is called in an abstract word—character. This individual differentia-

tion, so marked in humanity, exists less in other animal species. Nevertheless we notice very different characters in dogs, horses and even birds of the same race. It is very probable that bees do not all have the same character, since they are not all equally prompt, for example, to use their stings in analogous circumstances.

What is the object of life? The maintaining of life.

But the very idea of an object is a human illusion. There is no beginning, no middle, no end in the series of causes. What is, has been caused by what was, and what will be has for its cause what is. We cannot conceive either a point of repose or a point of departure. Born from life, life eternally engenders life. It must do so and wishes to do so. Now, life is characterised on the earth by the existence of individuals grouped in species, that is to say having the power, when a male is united to a female, of reproducing themselves. Whether it is the inner conjunction of protozoa, hermaphroditic fecundation, the copulation of insects or of mammals, the act is the same; it is common to everything which lives and not only to animals but to plants and perhaps to minerals limited by a constant form. Among all possible acts, in the possibility we can know or imagine, the sexual act is therefore the most important of all acts. Without it life would stop; but it is absurd to suppose its absence since in that case thought itself would disappear.

Revolt against so evident a necessity is useless. In vain

does our delicacy protest; man and the most disgusting of his parasites are the products of an identical sexual mechanism. The flowers we have cast on love may hide it like a trap for wild beasts; all our activities evolve around this precipice and one by one fall into it; the object of human life is the maintenance of human life.

Man only escapes this obligation of nature in appearance. He escapes it as an individual and submits to it as a species. The abuse of thought, religious prejudices, vices, sterilize a part of humanity; but this exception is of purely sociological interest; whether he is chaste or voluptuous, avaricious or prodigal of his flesh, in every state, man is none the less subject to sexual tyranny. All men do not reproduce themselves, nor do all animals; the weak and the late-comers among insects die with their robe of innocence, and many nests laboriously peopled by courageous mothers are devastated by pirates or the inclemency of the heavens. Let not the ascetic boast that he has preserved his blood from the pressure of desire; the very importance he gives to his victory asserts the power of the will to live.

Sexual ethnography scarcely exists. The scattered information on this very important subject has not been coordinated; still more important, it has not been verified. Precise knowledge of the habits of coition only comes from what life teaches, for questions of this sort are very difficult to ask and the answers are always ambiguous. There

is a whole science which has been corrupted by Christian modesty. A watchword which is still obeyed was given in the past, and we hide everything which sexually unites man to the animal, everything which proves the unity of origin of what has life and feeling. The doctors who have studied this question only met with the abnormal, the diseased; it would be imprudent to make their observations the basis for conclusions of general practices. The best source, at least for the European races, still remains the casuists. From the enumeration of sins against chastity noted by professional confessors we are able, after some study, to deduce the secret sexual morals of civilised humanity. But we must take care not to retain either the old idea of sin or the identical idea under a modern form, of fault, of misdemeanour, of error. Practices common to a whole ethnical group cannot be considered otherwise than as normal, and it matters little that they are marked as disgraceful by the apologists of good morals. What is good is what is, and what is contains what will be. It is certain that the bipeds and the quadrupeds are very licentious, whether this comes from their physical suppleness or from their intelligence. It is an undeniable and insuperable fact, although regrettable. From this tendency the human couple has derived a thousand erotic fantasies which, by becoming disciplined, have ended up in the creation of a real sexual method either of disinterested pleasure or of preservation against fecundity. Is this not important, and how can we discuss depopulation, for in-

stance, if we lose sight of this primary fact? What can moral or patriotic reasoning do in the presence of an instinct that has become, or re-become, an intelligent and conscious practice, bound up with what is most profound in human sensibility? It is very difficult, especially when it is a matter of man, to make a distinction between the normal and the abnormal; but what is the normal, what is the natural? Nature ignores that adjective which has been drawn from her bosom filled with illusions, perhaps in irony, perhaps in ignorance.

Facts in nature are linked up by a thousand bonds not one of which can be unravelled by human reason. When one of these intricacies is disentangled before our eyes we admire the simplicity of its mechanism, we think we understand it, we generalise, we prepare to use this key to unlock the next mysteries. Illusion! We always have to begin over again. And that is why the sciences of observation always become more obscure as we penetrate further into the labyrinth of life.

Of all sexual aberrations the most singular perhaps is chastity. Not that it is anti-natural, nothing is anti-natural, but because of the pretexts it obeys. Bees, ants, termites present examples of perfect chastity and at the same time of utilised chastity, social chastity. Involuntary and congenital, the neuter state among insects is a fact, equivalent to the sexual state and the origin of a de-

fined activity. Among men this is a state, often a matter of appearance or transitory, obtained by the will or compelled by necessity; it is a precarious state, so difficult to maintain that about it have been accumulated all sorts of moral and religious walls. And even real walls made of real stones and mortar. Permanent and voluntary chastity is almost always a religious practice. From the earliest times men have been convinced that perfection could only be obtained by such a renunciation. It seems absurd; on the contrary, it is very clearly logical. The only way not to be an animal is to abstain from the act to which all animals without exception necessarily yield themselves. For the same reason abstinence, fasting, was thought of; but as we cannot live without eating, while we can live without making love, this second method of attaining perfection has remained a mere outline.

It is true that asceticism, of which man alone is capable, is one of the methods which can raise us above animality; but by itself it is not enough; by itself it is good for nothing except perhaps to arouse a sterile pride, the active exercise of the intelligence must be added to it. It remains to be known whether asceticism, which deprives the sensibility of one of its healthiest and most exciting foods, is favourable to the exercise of the intelligence. As it is not necessary to elucidate this question here, nothing more will be said about it, except this provisionally: chastity should not be disdained, asceticism should not be scorned.

Man is elusive; the least of his habitual sentiments has multiple and often contradictory roots in a variable and always excessive sensibility. He is the least pondered and the least reasonable of all animals, although he is the only one which has been able to form an idea of reason; he is a mad animal, that is to say he spreads himself in every direction, he disentangles everything in theory and tangles up everything in practice, he desires and wills so many things, he uses his muscles in so many different activities that his actions are at once the most judicious and the most absurd, the most suitable and the most opposed to the logical development of life. But he takes advantage even of error, especially of error, which is fatal to all animals, and there lies his originality, as Pascal saw and Nietzsche has repeated.

If the word modesty is inexact when applied to animals, although we find in their habits the distant origin of that complex and refined sentiment, the word cruelty, when it is applied to natural acts of defence or nutrition, is just as inexact. Human cruelty is often an aberration; the cruelty of animals is a necessity, a normal fact, often the very condition of their existence. An anarchist philosopher, the out-of-date and naïve disciple of Jean Jacques Rousseau, thinks he has discovered a universal altruism in nature; with other words, another state of mind, and a few new examples he has re-made the childish books of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and under pretext of inclining

men to goodness he has abused the right we have of walking in the midst of nature without seeing it and without understanding it. Nature is neither good nor bad, neither altruistic nor egotistic; it is a collection of forces none of which yields except under superior weight. Its conscience is that of a pair of scales; as it is perfectly indifferent it is absolutely equitable. But the sensibility of a pair of scales is of one order only; the sensibility of nature is infinite to all actions and all reactions. Whether the strong eats the weak or the weak eats the strong, there is no compensation except in our human illusion. In reality one life has been increased at the expense of another life and in either case the total energy has been neither diminished nor augmented. There are neither strong nor weak; there is a level which tends to remain the same. Our sentimentality makes us see dramas where nothing is happening more disturbing than the general facts of nutrition.

EPILOGUES: SECOND SERIES

[EPILOGUES: DEUXIEME SERIE]

1904

IN France, according to the fashion, people will be pagan as in the sixteenth century, Gallican as in the seventeenth, philosophical as in the eighteenth, but Protestant, never! All the old Latin paganism rises up against the horror of this glacial Christianity; they accept, because it shines, an idol enclosed in a gilded shrine, they refuse the naked ugly Christ of St. Paul and his morality which destroys all civilisation, which hates all beauty, all carnal liberty and all intellectual grace.

After having let loose the madness of alcohol, by telling the people for fifty years that a glass of brandy contains more nourishment than a pound of bread, Science

has now turned brutally against the drinkers and has excommunicated the poison it used to distribute as a cordial. I would gladly believe that the science of to-day is more right than the science of yesterday, but we must perhaps expect from the Science of tomorrow a third opinion which will annihilate the other two. It is agreed that alcohol is a poison, but so is meat a poison, and it is probable that excessive nourishment causes as many diseases as drunkenness; there are many people to whom an indiscriminate vegetarianism would be dangerous and others for whom bread is mortal. From all this it appears that the disease of generalising is perhaps even more serious than alcoholism. Littré worked at night and drank brandy, which did not prevent him from composing a very fine dictionary and from living to be eighty; everybody knows alcoholics whose health is good and abstainers who are broken down. For this reason I should have some scruples about enrolling myself in the crusade which is protected by Monsignor Turinaz and a Swiss pastor who is little known and much less decorative than the Bishop of Nancy; but I am restrained by other motives, my distaste for leagues, a certain pity for the masses who get drunk in order to escape from life, the certainty that this anti-alcoholic league might very well become an instrument of Protestant propaganda. According to the desire of the Lutheran and Anglican female devotees who were the joy of the congress, the idea was to enroll children in congregations both of temperance and of piety. Miss Hilda Dillon of London boasted

of the "Bands of Hope" whose young members pledge themselves to drink only water and tea, and meet together every week to "sing, pray and listen" to the Methodist remarks of several old maids. Miss Jessie Forsyth of Boston declared that "it would be still better" to organise in France "Young Templars" who, like their delicious American models, would undertake not to drink, not to swear, not to smoke and not to use words contrary to morality. Oh! How much better it would be if the whole of France joined the Salvation Army! There is not much hope to give Miss Forsyth. This is an unfavourable time, nor does it seem as if the women of France are very anxious to follow, in accordance with the warm advice of Miss Agnes E. Stock, the example of the pious ladies of Hillsborough (Ohio) who in 1873 "organised a campaign of prayers and processions in the streets, with singing and hymns at the doors of public houses, earnest appeals to bartenders and drinkers"; these sorts of masquerade are only allowed in civilised countries on Shrove Tuesday and in mid-Lent, on the days when the slaves, which is a curious fact of atavism, dress up like their masters in the past centuries! In the Latin countries, or those touched by Romanism, there remains a certain sense of liberty of morals which is unwilling to tolerate these manifestations of despotic morality.

These ladies then were the joy and also the ridicule of this congress where the men of science nevertheless said some useful things; but the final banquet with its unalcoholic wines, wines fabricated at Berne by the most chemical

methods, cannot be considered as an episode of gaiety. What aberration urged these people to swallow gooseberry juice baptised wine, as the prior of the Carmelites baptised his Friday chicken a carp? Why did they not drink Apollinaris Water, like the Prince of Wales?

The great anti-alcoholic religion is divided, it appears, into two opposite sects. There are the temperates and the abstainers, I imagine the temperates are composed, apart from a few thousand fanatics, of all sensible or well bred men who have a horror, not of wine, but of drunkenness and all its turpitudes. In order to drink only a few glasses of wine a day and never any brandy, it is not necessary to be affiliated to a congregation and to disguise oneself as a "Good Templar"; it is enough to have a little intelligence, and this cannot be acquired. As to the abstainers, they are recruited among Anglo-Saxons and among women; they are divided into true fanatics and pretended fanatics. They reign over certain States of North America where all the public houses have been closed, but where it is agreed that the local drug-store will take the place of the liquor shop. In those countries given up to the madness of hypocrisy there is a druggist at every street corner (the profession is open to anybody) and so long as you have a doctor's prescription in your pocket (there are also a great many doctors) you may drink. All legal measures against alcoholism necessarily result in such compromises and frauds. And no one ever thinks of liberty! If all alcoholic drinks were freed from taxes, if brandy and absinthe cost

six sous a bottle, people would long ago have got tired of them; after the most ignoble excesses disgust would have come through satiety.

A writer's name, that is all that matters. That is the whole and the nothing which posterity retains of a writer who came too late according to the vulgar opinion for his works to have a real educative value. Moreover prose is little esteemed by the professors. However well selected it may be, however peppered with notes, however distorted by careful cutting, a page of prose sometimes contains a few ideas; and ideas are not educative; precepts are needed, and in default of dogmas, the affirmation of the old moral proverbs. Almost all our classic poetry is a dilution of the quatrains of Pibrac; even down to Voltaire they are moral in their tragedies, as submissive to the decalogue as a good servant to his master's habits. The cycle of education eternally moves about this principle, that virtue (the mask of obedience) is always rewarded, and vice (the mask of liberty) is always punished. That is why history is always conjured away in education; that part of it which cannot be hidden becomes the proof of both principles. Every celebrated man is necessarily virtuous, because he is celebrated; this is evident. Everyone realises that if Joan of Arc had made a false step, she would not have crowned the king of Rheims; or that, but for the Parc-aux-Cerfs, Louis XV would have kept India and America.

Is there any possibility of the great international Peace

which a conference is pretending to prepare for the world under the trees at the Hague? It is difficult for me to believe it, and that for exclusively historical and scientific reasons. We must not suppose that the human species can modify its mentality any more than it can renounce its physiological habits. Man will always make war because he has always done so; he was not always urged to war by necessity; it was not always the struggle for material life; we have to reckon with the passion for gambling; many ancient or recent wars are inexplicable if we forget that man struggles for the ideal possession of a moral supremacy with the same eagerness as for the possession of the goods necessary to physical existence. The man who is only rich lacks a something; he wants honours and wishes his own value to be recognised independent of his fortune. A fortunate and prosperous nation lacks something; it wants to be the sovereign, even though nominal, of as many other nations as possible. If national vanity is eliminated, it is hard to understand the recent colonial conquests; and on the other hand, but for this vanity, one cannot explain why a battle lost with soldiers is more painful to a nation and humiliates it more in its own eyes and in those of other nations, than a battle lost by diplomats . . .

Among animals the condition of the conquered is the condition of suffering; among human beings it is chiefly a condition of humiliation. To conceive a humanity without war, we must first conceive a humanity without anger, without pride, without passions, given up solely to feeding.

If this humanity were possible, men would no longer be men; they would be an animal species so different that no one can conceive of it. And this is absurd.

At the Hague conference they are only discussing international peace. They suppose that wars between nations break out determined by a conscious will. This belief is childish. But let us pass on, for there are many other wars, and first of all civil war. The necessity to fight is so strong in man that, when he lacks real enemies, he creates fictitious ones among his brothers and neighbours; if international peace were well-established its inevitable corollary would be a permanent civil war. If we have escaped it in these last years, this is due to a formidable army always ready to march to the interior as well as, and perhaps more than, to the exterior. No revolution is possible in a country where all the healthy men are slaves who must obey every requisition under pain of death. Before a party could have collected and armed twenty thousand rioters, there would be more than a million of men under arms to fight them. The revolutionary socialists, who otherwise have the brains of children of thirteen, are not ignorant of this; that is why they desire a disarmament which would loosen the fasces of Force to their benefit. Upon the whole, we are living on a war footing in an armed camp; on the day when they fill in the trenches, when they throw down the ramparts, when they demobilize the men, these men will fight among themselves inevitably, as wolves who have no common prey to pursue devour each other.

It is pleasant to discuss such questions; they are particularly made for discussion since they are insoluble. It is suspected, however, that war and peace are not opposing terms but rather different names for the same state at successive and sometimes overlapping periods. Peace is only obtained sword in hand.

The true interest of life comes from its obscurity; it is incomprehensible, illogical and uncertain, and that is why the most fastidious love it with a gloomy passion. If the solution of the enigma was whispered in our ear at the age of reason, should we be able to go on living? Having no more uncertainty, we should have no more hope. The philosophers' phrase, "I live out of curiosity", is applicable to all lives. Certainty is a state of annihilation. The notion of paradise is so near to that of Nirvana that Christian happiness and Hindoo happiness can be defined philosophically by the same word; both contain the idea of repose. All activity has uncertainty for its principle. Happiness itself, if it is presented under inevitable conditions, ceases to be desired with sufficient force to be happiness. We no longer desire the inevitable; we await it. Can happiness be separated from that ferment, desire? Yet all men ardently desire certainty; they desire it to a mad extent; they forget all the enjoyment, all the shades, all the charms of the present to hold out their arms and their foreheads towards a cold idol with an empty belly. Perhaps, if the time is

favourable, they can thrust their hands into the hole bored out by the multiple contact of blind wills; and then what? Is it certitude to touch a stone, wood, or a wound? Without submitting to views of finality, we may suppose that if certainty is a state of inaction, the mania for certitude on the contrary is a principle of action. Truth is only a statue of shadow, but to reach it man takes a thousand troubles one of which perhaps is fertile. This is only a risky hypothesis, for few human creatures are fitted to utilise an abstract principle as a lever, and that is very fortunate. Every time abstraction has become the guide of humanity, civilisation has deviated, has sunk, has despised life to exalt a celestial glow, to adore a star, an idea, a nothing.

There was a moment during the Roman Empire when they collected eagerly all the stories which concerned the barbarians and painted their character; that did not prevent the final catastrophe, but it allowed the survivors to know their conquerors better and to dominate them when conquered by the skilful use of the intelligence. Therefore it is good to remember M. Vaillant's definition of socialist action, "the dictatorship of the working class"; the remark is interesting, but it is imprudent; that is why I present it for the meditation of honorary socialists, so that they may ask themselves if it is really useful to excite against civilisation the ferocity of the little Attilas of the red flag. By appealing to egotism one is sure to have a reply.

I have not much more taste for a national university

than for a national pastry or national shoemaking. My instincts are not socialist; I shall die among the last defenders of liberty. Here then is a mind which shall be impartial in the quarrel, since it places on the same plane the catechism of the categorical Imperative and the admonitions derived from the four gospels. Why quarrel as to whether a child is brought up according to the Bible or according to Kant, since the poison is the same? Saint Paul and Cousin, Saint Ignatius and Tolstoy, all ministers of the Holy Gospel, distil the same morphia and the same morality for the little brains which must be paralysed.

Among the most singular errors propagated by the mediocre historians who have corrupted history in our time, this one amuses us: that the Reformation was an intellectual progress on the Renaissance, that it was a liberation, that it prepared future negations. This indeed is laughable, for no epithet is more befitting Luther than that of an affirmer. Luther is the affirmer of faith. Luther, more than any Pope of Rome, hated intellectualism and that free inquiry of which he is made the hero. He was the gross and brutal apostle of revealed truth; he was the sly and credulous peasant who tricks immediate authority and trembles before the prophecies of the almanac. He is so certain of the truth that he gladly defends it with lies; he precedes Loyola whose model and father he is; his calumnies against the magnificent and disdainful pagan Rome represent the devout envy of the monastic pedant against Episcopal elegance and the haughtiness of Cardinals; but

he had the skill or the instinct, like the Apostles of old, to give the people their own baseness as an ideal, and to erect into virtues impotence in the face of force, idleness in the face of life, cowardice in the face of God. His foundation is credulity. His critical pretentions fail in the presence of the oldest, and therefore the most doubtful, texts of religion. He believes wildly everything apocryphal in Christianity; the historical part by its very grandeur eludes his mean intelligence.

The attitude to the Reformation of Erasmus, of Rabelais and of all men of worth in Italy and France, the only countries then civilised, is very characteristic. They despised it because from the first day they judged it. They take it for what it is, a pious movement, a new negation of liberty and beauty. For them, who look down from above, the Reformers are a new horde of Franciscan monks; Rabelais makes no sort of distinction between these two sorts of rabble and closes the doors of Thélème to both. The following phrase must be considered as an indestructible aphorism: "Italy and France resisted the Reformation because they had reached a superior degree of civilisation." Their evolution was, and still is, several centuries in advance of the evolution of almost all the rest of Europe. Beyond the Alps Lutheran propaganda came into opposition with the smile of Leonardo's and Luini's women; France was less ironical and received a wound which reopened more than once and even to-day sheds a few drops of blood.

John Ruskin brought to men a noble idea, one almost of redemption; he taught them that beauty is inseparable from life; that art is not made for museums but for the daily necessities of our existence. No doubt it is important that there should be beautiful pictures in beautiful frames at the Louvre, and all in an admirable palace; but it is still more important that we should drink our wine in a delicately shaped glass, that the light of our windows should come to us over flowers, that our houses should be comely and luminous, and that we should finally retain an impression of harmony and unity from all our contacts with life.

Ruskin's books will remain for the pleasures of a few; his work is already dying. He had realised that in a true civilisation there is not the artist on one side and the workman on the other. He saw these two casts made into one, the artizan, as in the past. This dream cannot be realised. No doubt the past will once again become the present, since the number of combinations of human activity is not infinite; but a stable state of beauty is not possible. There are sacrified ages, among which is ours. Yet we must not complain. Life, in spite of the growing hatred of the State for liberty and beauty, is less narrow and less ugly to-day than it was forty or sixty years ago. The art of the Second Empire turns one's stomach; the porcelains of that time in truth weigh upon the epigastrium. To-day we are offered forms less rude and colours less drab. Furniture too has been raised a little from its baseness. Tolerable

Paris, 71, rue des Saints-Pères

18 déc. 1913

Cher Monsieur,

Je serai heureux que vous traduisiez un choix des Livres des Masques. Évidemment il vaut mieux éliminer les hommes tout à fait inconnus. C'est ce que je ferais moi-même, si c'était possible. Pour cela, j'accepte toutes les conditions que vous me ferez, ou plutôt votre éditeur. Vous pourrez également reproduire les bois de Vallotton, sans avoir rien à payer pour cela.

L'article que vous m'avez communiqué m'a fait grand plaisir. Je suis content qu'il paraisse dans ~~la~~ "Outlook". Si vous devez donner d'abord quelques Masques dans une revue, vous pourriez partager entre Outlook et New Free Woman. Je vous dirai que je préférerais Outlook. Mais faites comme vous voudrez.

Faut-il vous renvoyer la copie de l'article ? Je ne le

curtains can be acquired; walls may be hung with stuffs in which there is a consolation.

We owe all that to Ruskin. We must therefore meditate sadly on the death of a hero. He has done more for us than we could do for ourselves; he had more ideas than we are capable of realising. His work is a treasury which humanity will nexer exhaust.

The irreligion of Kant is a tale accredited by his disciples to make us believe in the liberty of their intelligence. It is only a tale. Kant and the Kantians of that time, like those of to-day, are the most religious minds in the world. They love religion so much that they have simplified it to the point that they make it enter everywhere; they have infested life with it. The terrible Kant is the father of Natural religion, of rationalism, of liberal Protestantism and in general of all superstitions which, by limiting in belief the share given to the absurd, give the remainder a terrible power of penetration. . . .

It is a scandalous abuse to make reason speak as an oracle, to make it recite the catalogue of moral laws. There is nothing of the kind in reason. The moral laws are no more contained in it than in the table of Pythagoras or the geometry of Euclid.

In a recent congress of anarchistic working-men this absurdity was vociferated: "For the law of the strongest we will substitute the laws of nature which alone are cap-

able of harmonising wills and needs!" Carried to this degree stupidity is not natural to man; this is a supernatural stupidity, a stupidity acquired by reading, fattened by state education. . . .

In a collection of harangues recently published, M. Jaurès cries magnificently: "Let us build a new Church, the great Socialist Church." Was there ever a bolder and more pious thought? M. Jaurès always seems to be passing a rosary of cocoanut wood through his fingers; he thinks; but perhaps with his beard, like the Capuchins. The superiority of our anarchist thinker is evident; M. Jaurès's thought is religious, his is scientific. I was thinking of science when I wrote "supernatural stupidity". There is indeed a new supernatural, a scientific supernatural, which like the other is woven from all the sons of the Virgin, from all the imaginations, all the desires, all the hankerings, all the superstitions which labour the weary nerves of inferior humanity. I do not insist on the admirable opposition between Force and Nature; by criticising them we spoil the invigourating effect of such aphorisms, we must enjoy them like a perfume, like a landscape, without trying to analyse them. But we may at least insist a little on this idea of "paradise" which comes at the end of every socialist couplet, as an eternal and devout refrain.

Let the working man open his eyes a little; not to ridiculous books, but to life; let him consider Nature, not as he dreams of it, but as it really is; not as a good Goddess or a good Virgin, a vain helper, but as at once the creator

and the work of all forces and all Force—and he will understand, if he can understand, that the harmony is necessarily perfect between wills and needs (to borrow his inexact terms) since that harmony is the very condition of the development of life.

Invoke all the other abstract words, but not that. It contains too many harsh things for your cowardly hearts. Ah! you want to be happy—and you address yourself to Nature! Nature is pitiless, it knows nothing of all our sensibilities—and if it could know them, it would laugh at them, as on Olympus, with an inextinguishable laughter.

The death of Nietzsche is not an event, since the man who had the highest and freest intelligence of this age fell ten years ago into the shadowy depths of unintelligence. It is a contrast which would animate the speech of a rhetorician—he who was liberated by the mind died the prisoner of stupidity, whether we must accuse a bad heredity, or whether Nietzsche had abused his intellectual energy. It is not without peril that a man compels himself to understand everything, to feel everything, to judge everything, and not by the vulgar principles of usual philosophy, but according to quite new and personal methods and ideas. And it happens that the bravest is caught with fear at feeling himself alone in his opinion among men. But what do causes matter, since it is a question of an endless chain, since all is determined, since the genius of a Nietzsche as well as the folly of a passer-by are bound up with a physi-

ological state? What matters this final madness of stupor, if Nietzsche displayed a superior intellectual force during his years of activity?

Nietzsche's madness is not an argument against his literary genius or against his philosophical genius. The philosophers, the eternal professors of philosophy scoffed at by Schopenhauer and Taine, concede the first point but not the second. And even persuaded from their own experience that a man cannot both think well and write well, they accept the writer, they proclaim the great poet, but they disdain the creator of value. They disdain him, or feign to disdain him. It is comprehensible, for Nietzsche is disturbing.

This good humoured man, in a fit of divine gaiety, began to shake an old tree of beliefs, and all the apples fell down. The philosophers were not disconcerted, they lay flat in the grass, quarrelled over the ripe fruits and, finding the same food, swore that nothing had changed in the life of intelligences. I do not think so; I think there has been a great change. From Nietzsche we have learned to demolish the old metaphysics built upon the basis of abstraction. All the old corner-stones are dust and the whole house has collapsed. What is liberty? A word. Then there is no more morality, except aesthetic or social; no more absolute morality, but as many particular moralities as there are personal intelligences. What is truth? Nothing more than what seems true to us, what flatters our logic. As Stirner says, there is *my* truth—and yours, my

brother. The sun has ripened the Virgilian horse, and from its rotten sides the swarm of new bees arises, singing and joyful.

An enemy of Christianity, Nietzsche in one sense took up and completed the main work of theology, which was the destruction of Reason. But he laboured, nor for the profit of belief, but, for the profit of reason itself become at last reasonable and human, on the day when it doffed its garments of cloud and left the column where, like a pillar-hermit, it lived in a stupid pride above life and above reality. When Nietzsche is better known a priori philosophy will be ended. No longer shall we construct a syllogism based on the abstract; no longer shall we lay down as a principle the very conclusion we are trying to reach. . . .

Even if Nietzsche's ideas are dangerous, they liberate. His logic is an alleviation to our minds; it gives the brain a new facility for thinking and understanding. . . . Nietzsche's philosophy is not for sensitive people who need consoling beliefs. It is for the strong and not for the weak, for those who do not need the sugared milk of hope in order to live.

Everything which tends to hinder the differentiation of the sexes is bad and harmful to civilisation, contrary to the general aesthetic of life. The more man and woman are different in mind, in tastes, in desires, in needs, the more harmonious is their coming together, the more solid and complete their union. For two people to be able to live

happily together, their disparity must be carried to the limit. Without surprise there is no love; man and woman must be a perpetual surprise to each other.

The more highly civilised a society is, the more the taste for associations declines. The multiplicity of associations is an obvious sign of immaturity or of retrogression. Whether the elements of force have not yet been separated from the vital mass, or whether exhausted by the very exercise of their force they have been reabsorbed by the herd, association flourishes, the cohesion of weaknesses. In the state of a flowering society individuals replace associations; a single person performs better the function of a group; and beneath individuals swarms the half-unconscious life from which personal intelligences arise according as they are needed.

In formulating its individualist laws, the French Revolution asserted the acquired superiority of the race. Believing it was determining the future, it noted the present. Under Louis XVI there were no more associations in France, either corporative or religious, or else they were dying. It is supposed that the Revolution turned thousands of monks into the streets. There were no more monks. Immense abbeys with churches like cathedrals were slumbering empty. . . .

The last century then was born individualist; this is born associationist and ready perhaps to become worse.

The coalition against natural and healthy forces grows worse. Left to their instincts, associations are capable of opposing all initiatives and even of thwarting life itself, their tendencies lead us to universal passivity. Every will must abdicate, if it is not in conformity with the average will. Whether it be religious, working-class or political, association is the grouping of idleness and stupidity against intelligence and activity. The strength then, odious and shameful, of an association is always the vow of obedience. The monk is less docile than the trade-unionist.

To understand the state of mind of the European working men, one would have to be able to put one's self in their place, share their illusions, take on their credulity. For twenty-five years and longer they have been promised the earthly paradise.

Weary of seeing nothing happen, they grow angry. What is more natural, have they not been sufficiently deceived! And it goes on, it gets worse. The prophets who indoctrinate them have changed; some have died in prison, some in the senate; but it is always the same sermon on the mount, the same lies, the same imbecilities. How happy we are going to be one of these days, definitely happy! The way? Very simple. We have only to proclaim the Social Republic. It appears that those two words mean "Justice-Equality," and that Justice-Equality is the name of an inexhaustible fountain of delights. One, two, three, four. . . . All numbers are equal among themselves, as

the Declaration of the Rights of Man says. Suppose we were to apply this famous Declaration at last? But they do not know how to go about it, and indeed it is a delicate affair. . . .

It is possible that the agitators may excite a revolution, but not one of them can foresee what will come of it. According to historical experience, after a period of a dozen years of universal misery, it generally results in nothing. When the fever fit has passed the organism takes up its life where it has left it and continues its inevitable evolution. But it may very well happen that speeches will be sterile, and the riots void. Is the moment near? Nobody knows. In any case the prophets among the socialist clergy will not hasten its coming. Nor strikes either. It is curious that the workers have not yet discovered a less gross method of polemics and one less dangerous to themselves. This primitive method is so bad that it scarcely succeeds once in a hundred times. One thinks of the peevish children who go without their dinners to punish their mothers; or of those Chinese who go home and slit up their bellies in order to annoy their enemies.

The judgments of M. Magnaud are often excellent, equitable and wise. If he did not surround them with clumsy remarks in a poor style, one would accept them gladly. He has just attempted with more skill than usual to legalize divorce by mutual consent. According to the law, people get married voluntarily, but they cannot get

un-married in the same way. If the couple reach a state when they have had enough of each other, the better gifted for this sort of exercise must resign himself to playing his part in a base farce. If the lady is the designated victim she must simulate in a hotel bedroom amorous frolics with a gentleman at three francs an hour. Then enter the commissioner of police decked with a tricolour scarf. For probabilities' sake there will be the cry of surprise (modesty) tears, (broken life), and getting dressed behind a curtain. If the man has to act he lets himself be surprised by two good friends with the maidservant; they call in the concierge; they beg the neighbours to take note of this conjugal fraud. It seems there can never be too many spectators for the unpleasant comedy of simulated adulteries. However Justice is satisfied.

The Marguerite brothers have recently published on this question a pamphlet which is perhaps a little too eloquent. Going much further than M. Magnaud, they demand not only divorce by mutual consent, but divorce at the request of one of the parties. This divorce would be new in our morals but not in history. It was in use; it is repudiation. But the man alone had the privilege. There is no need to say that the plan of the Marguerite brothers gives the right of initiative to the women as well. It is not unreasonable. It is certain that as soon as one of the married couple becomes hostile, impatient of his chain, as soon as it is obvious that affection has gone and that he feels nothing but hatred or disgust for his companion

of every hour—it is very certain that the marriage no longer exists. By a fiction the legal or social appearance may be maintained, but the bond is broken. If the partner from love, malice or scruple refuses consent (in the hypothesis of divorce by mutual consent), there is once more a situation without an issue. What may make certain minds hesitate in this question is that divorce is generally considered as a punishment. It is granted "to the profit" of one of the parties. But in the case of repudiation the punishment would necessarily fall on the person repudiated.

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There is another point which M. Magnaud will no doubt have to settle one of these days, for the indulgence of this shepherd will bring him numerous sheep; it is that of the marriage of accomplices. To authorise it would be almost to command it, especially in cases of feminine adultery. The ill-married woman, and almost all women are ill-married, could thus after experience choose a husband to her taste and ready to hand. It would be very favourable to women and would multiply divorces and second marriages. Men would only rarely find a serious advantage in it. The remark is of little consequence; everything which favours liberty is good, and everything which loosens the vice of the laws favours liberty. The old prejudices about women's chastity are no longer valid. No doubt a woman who has known several men has lost much of her chaste value; but is it really a value? At least it is an appreciable state. By losing chastity a woman acquires certain gains.

She grows supple, she learns to reflect, to choose; she augments her physical sensibility and that diminishes her sentimentality; it brings her nearer to man.

LITERARY EXCURSIONS

SERIES I

[PROMENADES LITTERAIRES]

1904

ALMOST all superior animals are more intelligent during their youth. The sign they give of it is their love of play, that is, of disinterested exercise. Intelligence is disinterested. It finds its end in the manifestation of its own activity; it is only additionally and as it were by accident that it becomes practical. But it may also be said that the more disinterested an act is the more nearly it approaches perfection; therefore the more disinterested it is, the more practical. . . . Genius is almost always accompanied by a strong propensity to play; in their moments of repose great men willingly act like children, and many are only big children of genius. M. Renan liked to play. But, being a man of the Church

and of the study, he played silently like the choir boys who play mute tricks on each other behind the altar. He read novels. They were his secret passion. More than once, it is said, Mme. Renan had to confiscate the jocose book wherein the author of *The Origins of Christianity* was deliciously wasting his time. "M. Renan," she would say severely, "I will give you back this nonsense when you have finished your article for M. Buloz." And the grieved writer took up once more the thread of his ideas about Averroes or the origin of language. Later on this need for play in Renan took a higher form. Instead of reading novels he wrote them himself. Having chosen the form of the dialogue he wrote *Le Prêtre de Némi, L'Abbesse de Jouarre,* and several other fantasies equally useless to his fame, but whose very inutility proves to what an extent the love of play remained developed in him till the very eve of his death.

As I have already explained several times, contrary to common opinion, criticism is perhaps the most subjective of all literary forms; it is a perpetual confession; while we think we are analysing the works of others we are unveiling and exposing ourselves to the public. This necessity explains why criticism is generally so mediocre and why it so rarely succeeds in holding our attention, even when it deals with the question which interests us most. To be a good critic a man must have a strong personality; he must be able to impose himself and to rely not on the

choice of subjects but on the value of his own mind. In art the subject matters little, at least it is never more than one of the parts of art; the subject is no more important in criticism, it is never anything but a pretext.

There was something quite new in the *Princesse Maleine,* and nearly every one of M. Maeterlinck's dramatic works had confirmed us in the idea that if the theatre could be renewed it would be by this method, at once ingenuous and sophisticated, which sets out to paint the mysterious side of men and to show souls rather than scenery. No critic has been willing to understand that, and the public was quite incapable of understanding it alone. But before, in *Cyrano de Bergerac,* they were moved to the bottom of their hearts.

This heroic comedy is certainly charming and far superior to the ordinary French play. It has several merits. It is written in sprightly, flattering, hectoring verses, which are sometimes tender and then for a few couplets good sentimental poetry. It is filled with wit, with amusing sallies, with bravado, with buffoonery. Then it broke happily with the mania for problem plays and did not attempt to prove anything; it sketched a character and related adventures. It must be said, because it is true—after the dreadful plays of Alexander Dumas, *Cyrano* was refreshing, a delicious iced wine after a long walk in dusty roads. It is easy to understand the astonishment of the critics and the joy of the public. For twenty years and

more we had been invited to the theatre to listen to lawyers discussing a beautiful divorce case, children's rights, the father's rights, the mother's rights, the State's rights, the future of society, the future city, military service; or else doctors discussed some unpleasant disease, some difficult surgical operation, the establishment of hospitals or of prisons and a number of other questions equally unpleasant and stupid, since they are insoluable, especially on the stage. In the presence of Cyrano's wit and bravura, the suspicious spectators felt regenerated; instead of the disgusting sides of life they were shown its most brilliant face; they were presented with love, heroism and beauty!

The enthusiasm was unanimous. It resulted in some illusions. M. Emile Faguet, usually so sober and even sceptical, was carried away with a sort of delirium. He compared M. Edmond Rostand to Pierre Corneille and asserted that we had just witnessed the representation of a new *Cid*. Recently he has repeated this strange estimate and has added something unexpected. According to him, *Cyrano de Bergerac* is at the same time something like the *Cid* and *Le Génie du Christianisme,* that is to say, if I understand him aright, the dawn of a new era in French literature. It is not altogether that. *Cyrano* is indeed a date in the history of our literature, but it does not mark the beginning of a new period; it marks the end of a romantic cycle. This glittering play is the last rocket in a display of fireworks.

The two forces which lead men are the desire of living and the desire of knowing, sentiment and curiosity, love and science. The drama of life is the conflict between these two forces, the struggle we carry on sometimes against one, sometimes against the other. When humanity allows itself to be dominated by the vital instinct, it may live an intense material life but lives it stupidly; if it blindly obeys the instinct of knowledge, it may rise very high in the intellectual regions but at the expense of practical necessities. Superiority in men, as in nations, occurs when the two forces are in equilibrium, when the intellectual flowering is the logical result of a strong material vitality.

This equilibrium is extremely rare and when it does happen only lasts for an instant. Individuals and nations unconsciously allow themselves to be dominated by one of these forces and, as the case may be, find themselves maintained in a state near to that of animality or intellectually exalted without measure.

The critical literature of M. Jules Lemaitre has the merits of clarity, acuteness and good sense; we may regret that his has not also, not principles which it can very well do without, but a direction. It indeed moves forward rather at hasard. This witty writer has lacked the posession of a literary faith, even for two or three years. That is the most fortunate of intellectual disciplines. We learn to judge by other motives than our personal taste; we feel the necessity for certain aesthetic sacrifices; we learn that

even in a limited field works may have a social interest independent of their art interest. Small literary groups are very useful; they initiate us into a certain quality of injustice, which has a great moralising value, because it is a means of opposing a greater injustice. The nerves always slacken soon enough and the time for certain concessions comes always too soon. Boileau, so cruel in his verses, is indulgent in his letters and prose commentaries. But, good or bad, his work was done. If the Symbolistes had not shown themselves so disdainfully unjust to Victor Hugo, they would never have conquered their place in the sun. The great defect of M. Jules Lemaitre's criticism is that it had no object; it lacked force, because its author lacked discipline. We may say the same of his imaginative works, novels or plays. Apart from certain initiative books, almost all literature derives its value from its conformity with a momentary aesthetic ideal. A contemporary of romanticism must be romantic; if not, whether Béranger or Viennet, he is no one. Can even a Shakespeare belong to no school at all? Shakespeare at first carried on the drama as he found it. It was the misfortune of some of our contemporaries, who were highly gifted, that they were neither Parnassians nor Naturalistes nor Symbolistes.

The beauty of tragedy and its human and superhuman interest lie in the fact that it only shows us persons living above the laws, free from vulgar duties, liberated by their birth and good pleasure from the miseries of sentimental

promiscuity, from certain hypocritical obligations, from the cautions of equality. When Louis XIV weeps for Mlle. de la Vallière the sincerity of his grief is absolute, for he has nothing to treat with deference, neither the proprieties which he regulates, nor opinion which he directs, nor himself, the model of attitudes. Man appears naked and in his misery, stripped of social costume, near to being a god or a pure animal, a man in short and nothing more than a physiology. That is the rampart against abstraction. The hero, humanly all-powerful, is made of flesh; he bleeds, he weeps and he moans; and these dominating emotions are freely excited without any obstacle but the limits which a sensibility places on itself.

Tragedy developed originality and egoisms; in default of gods and heroes it created chance demi-gods, proud adventurers with no fear save of force, their mistress and their enemy, men without method but superior in their disorder to the finest productions of rules and obedience. The drama and the novels of to-day, by warning men that they are subject to each other and jointly responsible, arrest individual efforts towards liberty. There are hardly any free men left. The strongest treat deferentially the customers who nourish their vanity; the mob directs the movements of heroes; the most disdainful shoulders bow beneath the anonymous gaze of the people.

Literature, which is not a country inhabited by simple people, is nevertheless filled with the most naïve legends.

Thus it is generally believed that all the great writers of a period lived in a state of perfect friendship or at least of profound reciprocal esteem. Second rate professors who only esteem literature as a school of morality, a method of education, do not hesitate to describe to us the feelings of respectful admiration which Molière and Racine, Boileau and La Fontaine felt for each other, and even Bossuet and Fénelon, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire. At all costs it must be insinuated to children and to that big child, the public, that genius is always accompanied by virtue, by all virtues. Have not these audacious educators gone so far as to make George Sand the model of family mothers, the preeminently good lady, a sort of lay Madonna? As to Victor Hugo, it is quite agreed that all his contemporaries admired him, adored him; that he never met a contradictor except in the lowest class of politicians or *littérateurs;* that he was a god, in whose presence the best minds of the nineteenth century felt honoured at being allowed to swing the censer.

If the cult of Victor Hugo really existed, it was chiefly practised by pious parasites who made their living out of that altar, and it always met with numerous contradictors. We can admire a man and even consider him a great poet, without feeling obliged to fall on our knees before him or to take off our hats when his name is mentioned, as the Spaniards used to do when they spoke of God or the King. In France we do not like such exaggerations; we think them in bad taste. Victor Hugo's incense-bearers would

have made him ridiculous if that were possible; the ridicule fell on them, and it was in the midst of a rather moderated enthusiasm that we inaugurated the other day the rather ordinary museum which some worthy people wished to consecrate to his memory.

In spite of the profound influence which romanticism has exercised on French minds, it has remained classical, a lover of measure, of the rule, of a dignified simplicity. It would be hard to convince those who have retained some sense of tradition and historical truth, that all French literature is summarised in Victor Hugo, that there was nothing before him and that there will be nothing after him. French literature has now nine centuries of existence; it has several times made and re-made the education of Europe. A man, however great he may be, a Victor Hugo himself, only has his place in so immense a cycle; he does not fill the whole cycle.

Such an estimate will not satisfy the literary devotees who bring everything back to Victor Hugo, make him the centre, if not of the world, at least of French thought in the nineteenth century. These devotees come near to considering as malefactors those who retain the full liberty of their judgment before the colossus. But usually, distressed in their piety, they put their fingers in their ears in order not to hear the blasphemies; or else they feign not to have understood.

I think there has never been such a growth of extrava-

gance at any other moment of our vast and long literary history. The Romantics themselves seem sober and meek beside the Decadents. Even when they got tired of that name and wished to be called Symbolistes, what fever there still was and what insanities! The cause? It has not yet been found. It is certainly rather social than literary. No doubt it must be looked for in that development of individualism which accompanied the first years of the Third Republic. Political liberty, which was then immense, engendered the taste for literary liberty. To-day, when political liberty tends to be restricted, literary liberty follows the same course; the latest young writers are almost all Socialists, moderate, disciplined, and practical. They support the government (which is their affair); fifteen years ago we did not even know that there was a government. We enjoyed the liberty of writing, the liberty of living, every liberty, and thought of nothing but expressing our way of thought even if it was a little mad.

But decadence—what an error! Never had there been so much extravagance, perhaps because there had never been so much sap; talents were born every day. There was a perpetual creation, as in the first ages of the world. And how disinterested these young people were! But, I must admit, this excessive disinterestedness which led them to defy the public, to make fun of the newspapers and to hide themselves in tiny reviews, was also one of the causes of their tardy success. They pretended they could get on without the vulgar reader, who very easily got on without them.

Between 1885 and 1895 it was impossible to write in verse or prose without thinking of Mallarmé or Verlaine. Mallarmé was of great importance. You went to call on him, rather as you would go to the Sibyl; you listened to his talk as though it were an oracle. Really, he was a sort of god. He was even more venerated than he was beloved. He was benevolent, but without any familiarity. Praise from his mouth was as disturbing as a decree of Providence. I can still see M. de Régnier blushing with emotion at a delicate compliment from the master. That little drawing room in the rue de Rome was an excellent school of respect; there we felt the value of fame, we learned to set its radiance above all other human distinctions. Perhaps only those who were the disciples of Mallarmé can understand the profound meaning of the words which are to be read in the life of a Greek philosopher: "He was a disciple of Socrates." The respect we felt in that little sanctuary was not superstitious; it was legitimate, for Mallarmé's talk was indeed, as M. Moréas says, "a clear source of aesthetic pleasures." . . .

Verlaine inspired less respect; it was rather curiosity. He was only too well known. He was to be met with too often in strange company on the Boulevard Saint-Michel. It was not rare to see him drunk. Those who liked his poems avoided him and dreaded to hear unpleasant anecdotes about him. He was not so much a man as an elderly child. He had no control over himself, gathering sensations as a schoolboy gathers blackberries from the hedges

on his way home from school. . . . He was a child, yes; but he was a vicious child and sometimes evil. His candour is a legend, and his misery is another. Certainly he never lived in opulence; but that was very fortunate for him and for us. Wealth would have shortened his life, for he had absolutely no reason. Nature, and not society, must be held responsible for his miseries; he had a terrible temperament; he was like a horseman without spurs or bridle mounted on an impetuous horse.

I do not think the American environment was more hostile to Poe than the French environment was to certain of our contemporaries. He had enemies, but also literary friends and admirers; he lived with two women whom he adored, Mrs. Clemm and Virginia; he earned his living by work which does not seem to have displeased him, for he liked to write, and not only his tales and poems, but his articles; he was combative, he lingered over, he enjoyed his polemics where he insisted on having the last word, although his insolence was ill-suited to disarm his adversaries.

His full value was not known, but his relative superiority was admitted; it seems certain that if he had lived, his last years would have been those of a literary dictator; he was destined to conquer, even in the rude intelligence of his compatriots, the reputation of Longfellow for whom he was cruel and who yet did him justice.

In England, yes, he would have been better appreciated; England has a really intellectual, really aristocratic public

for whom an original page of writing is a benefit and who can show pecuniary gratitude. The Englishman pays for his pleasures.

In France Poe would perhaps have suffered more. He was no more capable of earning his living than Baudelaire, Flaubert, Villiers, Verlaine, Mallarmé; his tales with their rich ideality would have been scorned, like those of Villiers, by the mass of democratic readers and no review or newspaper would have accepted his disdainful violent criticisms, which abruptly dropped their aggressiveness only to treat the most obscure problems of the expression of thought in a style whose precision is sometimes a little harsh.

A writer of high intelligence always considers that his environment is the worst of all those in which he might have lived. The scorn which Poe professed for the Americans, Schopenhauer felt for the Germans, Carlyle for the English, Leopardi for the Italians, and Flaubert for the French. Some know that all human herds are the same; they have no desire to eat in other fields a grass which is always poisoned by the malevolence of man.

EPILOGUES
THIRD SERIES

[EPILOGUES: TROISIEME SERIE]

1905

IN the day of his apotheosis M. Berthelot declared: "To-day Science claims the material guidance, the intellectual guidance and the moral guidance of society." Which Science? I know that in 1862 M. Berthelot obtained the synthesis of acetylene, but has that any relation to morality and does it confer the right to regulate philosophical researches or to direct the construction of submarines? Such remarks are unfortunate, and worse than unfortunate. They urge one to sarcasm. For a time they throw into the anti-scientific opposition the sound minds which love the sciences and cultivate that which suits the form of their intelligence. A scientist must not talk about what is not his job; or if so, it must be with

the prudence of one venturing out of the domain of which he is master. Neither Lavoisier nor Pasteur pretended to govern men's intelligences or to solve the enigma of the world. Nor did they prophesy. Anybody can prophesy the future. There were babblers who transformed the assembly which fêted M. Berthelot into "a popular university". We expected some noble remark on the sadness which a man who knows so many things must feel at knowing, after all, nothing; and we had the insipid congratula tions of a naïve optimism. What is life? M. Berthelot knows what camphor is. That is something. But what is life?

Ten years ago, perhaps more, I read this phrase of M. Berthelot's: "Nature has no longer any secrets for us." And I admit it has haunted me for ten years. I cannot read his name without that verse of a monstrous psalm ringing in my head, and I reflect that neither a great poet like Victor Hugo nor a great chemist like M. Berthelot is necessarily a great thinker. It seems easy to say that. Yet perhaps it needs more acuteness and more courage than you think.

The natural sciences still recognise the authority of the Bible. They have rejected Aristotle, they have preserved Moses. Recently Herr Haeckel in a testamentary book, felt it necessary to assert strongly: man is a mammal! This rough notion offends pious souls. The animals were created at random, as we sow wheat; but particular and mi-

nute motions were necessary for man. The work was so great that it exhausted creative power. After man, there was rest. Open the first book of natural history, you will find the words of Moses religiously embalmed in it. Moses had it from Jehovah, who had it from Elohim, a multiple god whose name begins the Bible: Bereshith bara Elohim. . . . It is a touching genealogy. It is so touching that it makes the hand of scientists tremble, and having read the antiquity of man in life they write his youth in their books, and present this ancient primate as the master's last thought. Human pride, counselled by the religions, will perhaps never admit, even though it is evident, that man is neither alpha nor omega, that he is only one of the links in the chain of beings, and that after him creative force continued to be exercised and to imagine new forms at once more simple and mechanically endowed. We do not stick to the evidence. Under the pretext that he speaks, which is generally regrettable, man continues to be treated as a remarkable exception. On the stage of the world he is given the brilliant part of the five-footed sheep, which saves him from classifications and makes him conspicuous. To separate men definitely from the beasts have they not gone so far as to propose the expression "human kingdom?" Thus, a great victory for Christians, Spiritualists and Humanitarians, we should have four "kingdoms" as a pendant to the four elements. But this strange kingdom would only contain one class, one order, one genus, one species. The unity of the human species is especially

important to well-behaved science. We speak familiarly of the human genus, but it is not Biblical, it is not religious, it is not Humanitarian; it proclaims neither the Mosaic law, nor Christianity, nor Spiritualism, nor the universal fraternity of all who are capable of admitting great principles. There is a human species and there is only one. The Bible asserts: God created man in his own image. He created a unique man, male and female, and not different men; an ancestral couple and not Aryans, Semites, Mongols and Negroes. And it was to redeem humanity, the daughter of this hypothesis, that the son of Jehovah was willing to perform the act of devotion which has made him famous. However it was necessary to explain at least to the eyes, the variable colour of this unique humanity; the races were invented.

This ambiguous word is one of those which was to serve as a bridge between religion and science. It has no value, relates to nothing definable, unless it is taken as the strict equivalent of a fixed variety. But a fixed variety behaves as a species; it remains identical to itself or disappears. It is the product of an evolution and can evolve no further; it has reached its finality. While other species and other varieties advance by slow transformation toward the stability which will be their last stage before death, there are such differences between the human sorts that it is very difficult to see in them only modifications of a unique species. Everything which lives has a certain common, protoplasmic origin, but even the nearest species do not descend from

each other. Each has its particular line. Considered as races the human varieties would descend from a human couple common to all; considered as species they very probably share their common ancestor with many other species; the gorilla and the Semite, the gibbon and the Mongol, the orang-outang and the Aryan—six branches of the fan. This way of looking at the matter is rather offensive; but it must be accepted if we really want to get out of the theological era. If naturalists, says (I think) Bory de Saint-Vincent, saw two insects or two quadrupeds as constantly distinct in their exterior form and permanent colour as the white man and the negro, they would not hesitate to make them distinct species, in spite of the mongrels which are born when they are crossed. Indeed, neither speech nor intelligence are sufficiently characteristic signs for us to group together in a separate domain the animals which talk or which reason. If we retain speech alone, there are the talking birds; if language, there are all the sociable animals; if intelligence, the insects, the frail hymenoptera show an intelligence which while less varied is more certain than that of the average man. There is no such thing as instinct and intelligence. Instinct is only crystalized, regularized intelligence; or rather intelligence is only instinct in a state of licentiousness. The world is made of a single tissue woven from one fibre, and it is the same force which bows the anthers of a flower towards the pistils and excites in a human brain those motions which command an explanation of the universe.

Unity must be understood; but diversity must be felt. There are human species; the human races are distinct and irreducible. How many human races are there? I cannot say, nor can anyone. Are there still formed from year to year new varieties destined to a future fixity? The ethnic map of the earth is in a constant state of oscillation; but while white America from north to south is under the influence of a soil and climate new to our species, a laboratory of human varieties whose results we do not know, the old world seems to have reached a period of stability. Perfectly fixed species, stable varieties share it; nor have continual mixtures been able to efface the original mark in any production. However complex the crossing may be, one of the ancestral types in the end gains the upper hand; for example, from a Semite or an Aryan there can only be born an Aryan or a Semite—which explains the difference we instinctively recognise between certain Israelites. The colour of mulattos produces the illusion that a given individual is half white, half negro; it is an error; he is white or he is black. From the moment he is born the return path opens before him. If the brother and the sister were crossed we should see one of the first types reappear in a very few generations.

The notion of human species, substituted for that of races, for that of a species, does not in the least imply the necessity for a social antagonism. When domesticated the most widely different species, herbivorous and carnivorous animals, live fraternally together. Civilisation, which has

domesticated men, urges them to tolerate each other mutually instead of devouring each other; the more intelligent they are the less one species will hate another. But, first of all, we must feel diversity and our own diversity; we must be suspicious of false fraternities and yield nothing of our nobility to rival prides. There are differences which are not distances; the Berber agrees with the Arab, the Finn with the Scandinavian and the Saxon; in general the Aryan and the Semite can understand each other; although conversation may be sometimes difficult. There are differences which are distances, and almost impassable. They may be passed sexually but never socially. And now Mr. Roosevelt,—who is the cause of these remarks,—undertakes to impose on the whites the supremacy of coloured men, even though locally, though momentarily, even though these blacks are distinguished. It is a matter of some school-master, some justice of the peace. It seems nothing and it is enormous. There are negro parsons, negro priests, there are Chinese ones; what French Protestant, which of our Catholic peasants would go without laughter or without disgust to confide in such a minister, though a real one, of his religion? The species dominates the religion. No doubt religion is a bond, and a Chinese Christian has acquired some notions which bring him nearer to a civilised occidental; but it is rather loose. Mr. Roosevelt's negroes may be excellent Wesleyans, perfect Baptists, delightful Methodists, but the Saxon and the Latin or the Celt revolt unanimously; and their revolt is good, for it is in

conformity with the will of nature. Patriotism of the soil is excellent; we must defend our houses against thieves, it is elementary. Patriotism of the species or if you prefer the literary word, patriotism of race has become as necessary as the patriotism of the soil. I see the negro question, which is still particular to the United States, growing vastly larger. Tomorrow, under one colour or another, it will be asked in the whole world. The Americans, by protesting against Mr. Roosevelt's too Biblical sentiments, are serving the cause of civilisation, which is absolutely bound up with the pre-eminence of the white race; but if they would obey him, accept black functionaries, marry negresses and produce a fine race of half-breeds, if in short they agreed to degen erate, they would do Europe a great service. The country of Judge Lynch is too vigorous to consent to such humiliations, and the noble patriotism of the species is too powerful there. It is better to lynch negroes than to erect statues to the Schoelchers.

There are good morals; there are bad morals; does not everybody—all honest people—understand these words in the same manner? Alas! Yes, the honest people are always unanimous when it is a question of destroying a liberty. But we are dealing with a precise question: What is obscenity?

Young Japanese girls knead and serve at the fan y table cakes in the shape of a phallus; the albums of several Japanese Giulio Romanos are very fashionable, during visits the

Japanese turn them over, laugh at the diversity, the unforeseen nature of the poses. The Roman ladies wore phallic necklaces; in India the *linguam* is a pious ornament; Catholicism has preserved and sanctified the cult of Priapus. Moreover the whole of Christianity rests on sexual questions; a virgin refuses herself to her husband, gives herself to a god, becomes pregnant and is delivered without losing her virginity. The Protestants do not admit Mary's conjugal continence and give her "natural" children—an excellent point of departure for a spicy controversy on the advantages and disadvantages of virginity. A Christian ought to make the sexual act the permanent subject of his meditations. *Omne vivum ex ovo;* and religions too.

The whole life of men and women in all social conditions turns about the junction of the sexes as about a pivot. Not to yield to it is the concern of those who have vowed to be chaste, and this vow itself is the cause that they think more of love by not making it than those who make it. The allusion to the provoking gesture, the description of the actions it provokes, from the glance to the pressure of the hand, the caress, the clothed embrace, the contact, the kiss, are almost all art, all literature. Moralists watch that these representations shall be decent; but to outline the limits of decency they must have indecency under their eyes; they enter the *penetrale* and it is from within that they shut the door in the face of the profane. The calmest dances and those which are considered chaste only amuse because they represent a simulacrum of the game of love.

In marriage ceremonies the simulacrum is incarnated and played to the life. Everyone who sees the bride sees the nuptial bed. Here the veil is a transparency which accentuates nudity. Everyone carefully watches those who are going to bed together and sees the movements they are about to perform; the pleased matrons would be indignant at the same signal of understanding between lovers. However, it is secretly understood that all this matrimonial mimicry is only mimicry. In the past pregnancy was displayed; now it is hidden, for it is an admission of carnal relations which everyone agrees are unknown to delicate people. In English novels there is never any question of possession; they exchange kisses like a butterfly and a lily. Similarly, popular literature has replaced the plain word of the past by strangely banal expressions; in our songs "maidenhead" has become "advantage", "pledged heart" etc. From top to bottom of society in all the countries newly repainted with Christianity, we find this double concern: to think only of the sexual act, to act only to prepare it, to mimic it from morning to evening; and to feign a perfect ignorance of the existence of this dominating thought, of the significance of all these movements, this perpetual comedy. It is easy to understand the rage of so many unconscious sycophants when someone indiscreet or foolish utters the solution of the enigma aloud.

The middle ages, which did not know modesty, were necessarily ignorant of obscenity. They were naïvely realistic in the plastic arts and in poetry; supported therein by

the Fathers of the Catholic Church, by Clement of Alexandria who said: "Why should I be ashamed to name the parts which God was not ashamed to create?"

In the ivories, in the wood-carvings of the middle ages the female sex is carefully figured; the earliest engravings follow this tradition; Clodion continues it; in one of his terra-cottas at the Louvre, a crouching girl, he cleaves the pomegranate without shame. The feminine marbles of the Greeks are depilated because Greek women used depilatories; the males have their curls. It would be better to veil the sex of painted or sculptured women with a scarf in the Protestant manner than to shave them like a chin; it would be less distressing.

What is the obscene? No one knows. Yet the genesis of the idea can be explained. It is generally accepted that the sexual act is only a physiological hypothesis; you may make certain allusions to it, either purely scientific, or plainly laughable, when it becomes "gauloiserie". As soon as people have laughed they are no longer shocked, for they have given a proof that they consider these things as unimportant, trifles which do not interest smart people, and at the same time as strange things which they have heard spoken of very vaguely, practices whose singularity is surprising and excites good humour. On the contrary everyone gets ıgry and forms a league against the ill-bred person who takes it on himself to speak seriously of these futilities; the obscene is the sexual fact treated seriously.

As to the idea of verbal obscenity, which causes certain

words to be shunned, it is much easier to explain. These words are obscene partly because they are rare; they are rare because we have not to name in public the exterior parts covered by clothes. The remainder of their obscenity comes from what they represent, and that goes into the preceding paragraph. A child has buttocks; they are plump, they are rosy. A young "lady" has none at all, like the Queen of Spain who is void under her panniers. But she has hips, although the world certainly includes the buttocks in its meaning which has recently been extended and amplified. The names of the different parts of the body are not so fixed as is believed; they slip.

Custom qualifies words; it also qualifies actions and aesthetic representations. In Calvinist countries a marble nude is obscene. An image which makes a provincial family shudder does not detain the glance of a young Parisienne for an instant. It is a common remark that there is a close relation between place, season, hour, and feminine costume; a dance allows nudities not permitted at a small evening party. Women, who make a parade of modesty and are in fact quite devoid of it, obey; with docility they show or hide their shoulders or their legs, their knees or their breasts, when it is commendable to do so. The fashion which should invite them to the nudity of Eden would not arouse any objection in them. The Directoire saw them dressed once more in transparent clothes; in the eighteenth century they displayed their breasts.

Fashion, which makes the fashion, also regulates plastic

art and first of all that which is most familiar to us, painting. Would any one dare to paint this picture: a young woman lying on the grass in a light summer dress, a passer-by approaches, lifts the dress and looks? It is Corregio's Antiope. As to the Venus of Titian, "bathing with indifference her slender fingers in a muff", she is the living and admirable demonstration that no gesture, no pose of a woman can be either immodest or obscene or ugly, if the woman is beautiful. Obscenity is only in the male; and even so, the pictures of Pompeii prove that it is a matter of appreciation. What is the obscene? A fugitive, changing notion like morality itself, that dreary face of fashion.

Never perhaps has there been so much talk of the law, its utility, its beauty, its fecundity, the marvels it necessarily engenders, the happiness it must sow among men, with a noble gesture. The Law is the Law; it seems to some people that when that has been said, everything has been said. The Law speaks, we must bow to it. It speaks badly and utters stupidities; we must bow to it. It crushes the passers-by; we must smile benevolently, for it is the Law. If it is kind and conciliating, if by chance it utters wise and gentle words, we must only show our joy by discreet applause. We owe it neither insults nor compliments. Its nobility is so lofty and so ancient that it is equally improper to boast of it or to throw doubts on it. Who made the Law? It must not be told.

Should we obey the law? Certainly, and even before

it has opened its mouth; we must obey it, as an unarmed man obeys a lion who bars his way; we must climb up a tree. One of the anxieties of an intelligent man is to take care that he never falls within the grasp of the law. His tranquillity is at stake, and also his honour, his cleanness. No distinction is to be made between political laws and the others; it is shameful to endure any of them. What a humiliation to be judged in the name of human stupidity, in the name of social cowardice.

The law is a spring-trap. The intelligent man scents them and avoids them even when hidden under cunning leafage. He is not afraid of the law directly, but of the pretext which allows men to apply it. So his conduct is exemplary and pious. This intelligent man shows all the appearances of the highest morality, because his conduct is guided by the most cautious prudence. He thinks of the trap. He treads delicately in life.

"To obtain the gnosis," says a certain Carpocrates, the gnostic, "the first condition is to repudiate social conventions, and to despise the laws." I do not desire to obtain the gnosis, but to live calmly and to dissociate or reintegrate ideas in the peace of my heart. I listen to Pascal: "Reason of effects. Admirable! They will have it that I shall not honour a man dressed in brocade and followed by seven or eight lackeys! What! He will have me thrashed if I do not salute him. His clothes are a force."

We must obey the law.

If the politicians of all classes who call themselves free-thinkers had sufficient intelligence and a clear enough gaze to discern their true place in the world, they would be frightened. They would see their incredulity become a religion and propagated as such; they would discover themselves to be "reactionaries and clericals." For today their adversaries are not the priests, but the realistic atheists, disciples of Hobbes and Nietzsche, men without principles, without morality, without ideal, men for whom life is an unknown sea which must be navigated with a sounding line. There are no more charts. We no longer seek the truth nor the islands of Paradise; we seek to avoid error but we know that error is not the contrary of truth and we gladly think, like Voltaire, (as read by Nietzsche), "that it has its merit."

Is it possible that the time has come when there are minds to whom the cult of Reason seems as unreasonable as the cult of the Sacred Heart? It is possible. That time is here, under your eyes, and you do not see it, because you live in the posture of devotees with eyes lowered on your illusions.

Man has never thought that his present condition was normal. He has always thought of an earthly paradise behind him or before him. In the past while he dreamed of a lost golden age, he submitted to reality; that was pagan civilisation. Christianity maintained the notion of a past

golden age, an Earthly paradise, and added the vision of a future golden age. It was first placed on the earth, then for more certainty in the beyond, a celestial paradise, the invention of a marvellous cunning. During several centuries men asked for nothing more. But hope has limits of extension, as if it were woven of matter and not of illusion. The thread broke. One of the ends flew up so high that it has never been seen again; the philosophers picked up the one lying on the earth and readjusted it to another idea, to the first form of the Christian idea; decidedly the future paradise is earthly and not celestial, it will be realised very soon in time and space. This promise was a great social imprudence. Since that epoch the people have been waiting, do not see anything come, and sometimes grow angry. In 1789 the whole of France was persuaded that it was about to enter upon an era of universal happiness; the dream was shared by part of Europe. The brutalities of the Revolution were nothing but the anger of a disappointed child. At the moment (1903) the workers are certain that "if the social Republic were proclaimed" everyone would immediately be happy.

I am not here discussing the idea of progress, especially the idea of social progress. On the contrary. What follows will be the less disputable because progress will be considered as more real, more materially tangible.

Let us admit that there is progress. This progress is vain, because man, gifted with an infinity of aptitudes, is necessarily insatiable.

No *really real* amelioration is possible in the condition of men because:

1. It does not bear on the same men, who in the course of their lives can only compare incomparable quantities or qualities. What increases the pleasure of living at thirty often dimishes it at fifty;

2. Men, whatever their position, their wealth, their authority, are only rarely happy and for a short time. Happiness is a physical state which can be neither foreseen, arranged nor made stable. Its own duration destroys it. It is a fugitive fact because it is a relative fact;

3. Even if treated more and more favourably, men would not feel this progression. The slightest present suffering dominates and annihilates all past joys. The newly-rich does not enjoy white bread by thinking of the hovel where he crunched potatoes. He eats it and complains that it is badly baked;

4. Everyone knows by experience that a satisfied need is immediately replaced by another need. The achievement of a progress immediately gives the need for a new progress, and this need is a source of pain so long as it is not gratified. The *ignota nulla cupido* is no longer correct; there is an anxiety for the unknown which corrupts the usage even of the pleasures of civilised life.

Man is insatiable; nothing contents him because nothing fills him. This character, which poets and philosophers make a spiritualist argument, is not peculiar to the human species. The rudiments are to be observed in domestic ani-

mals; spoiled dogs demand an ever more delicate and more varied food; sensibility is the more imperious when it is obeyed; abstinence numbs it, abundance excites it.

Condorcet, that geometrical dreamer, contemplated the developments of "an indefinite progress." This idea can only be accepted if the word progress here is given the more moderate sense of change. Every progress implies a loss, the loss of what is replaced by a new form, a new habit. Even in the most favourable cases therefore it is only a change. On the other hand the number of combinations verbally unlimited, are rarely limited; whence under the name of novelties comes the return to old and forgotten states. A progress therefore is only a change; but a change becomes a progress as soon as it is thought of as such. Everything is relative and must be considered from the subjective point of view. It is absurd to reason about absolute qualities. The idea of progress in itself is an inanity. Civilisation, while thinking it was progressing, might slowly revert to an ancient state, without men being conscious of it.

There are moments in history when humanity appears immobile; that is because we see them ill from too great a distance, and their movements escape us. Change is the law; if it is sometimes more frequent or more sudden, it is never lacking. Its absence would be a sign of approaching death, not of a long decadence but of an immediate and inflexible death. It is perpetual, and this constancy is the reason of its uselessness for individual happiness. We no

longer feel the progress we have desired as soon as it is obtained. It enters into the habits of life, melts into them and disappears.

And thus humanity moves without respite towards nothing, for nothing, from the necessity either to move or to perish.

All faith implies persecution; where there is persecution there is religious belief, there is faith. Some have seen a rudiment of religion in the devout and devoted love of the dog for his master. It is not unreasonable. The devotion of men to an idea or to a man, to a truth or to a sentiment, is always a religion, the simpletons want to get free and think they have succeeded when they have changed the yoke. What is the use? We must believe since we must live, and we must persecute our enemies because we must conquer. There is tolerance. It is only practicable to minds of a scepticism so contemptuous that it is ferocious, or minds whose stupidity is so thick that it is invulnerable. Yet it is a sign of superiority that in France we do not see the doors of five or six rival churches gaping on the same square; that would result in scuffles, hootings and battles, according to the day; above all it would result in battles as history superabundantly shows us. When a nation is not sufficiently stupid to endure the simultaneous exercise of two or three religions, the State intervenes, suppresses them all but one, or else enacts a law of contempt, a law of tolerance. Then it is possible to cross the public square

without fear of the sneers, the insults or the blows of religious delirium. Tolerance is highly esteemed. It is a great virtue, say those who wish to be tolerated. Treat us with pity, with contempt, that is to say with tolerance, we ask no more. Give us life, nothing but life, life all naked and cold, Mr. Executioner. The force which tolerates is foolish; the weakness which wishes to be tolerated is cowardly. They should die nobly and know how to endure without complaint the insult with which they would have crushed their enemies if they had been the stronger.

Good or bad, useful or harmful, tolerance always comes to an end and that is when the tolerated party has rebuilt its muscles and rested its nerves. It revives, attacks its old conquerors. Thus there is formed a positive law of alternate persecution. Sometimes it is simultaneous; this is called civil war or religious war, the extreme expansion of human folly.

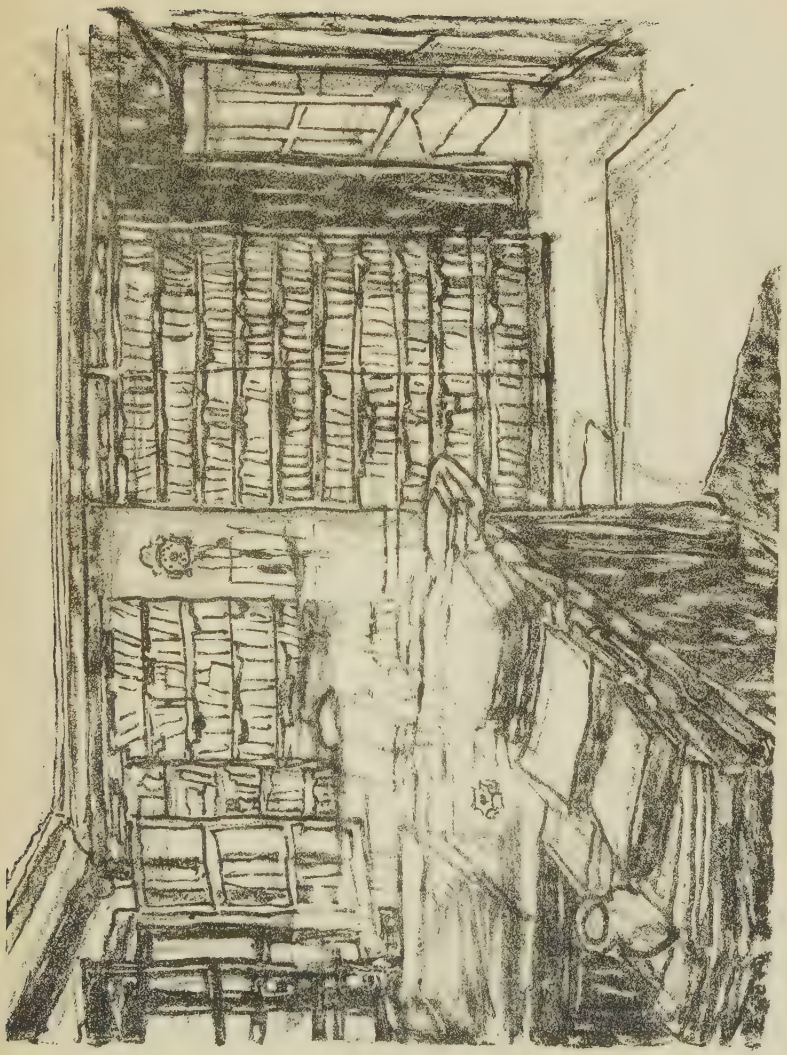
Christianity, that religion of love, contains great persecuting force. It is persecuting to the point of dividing itself in order to allow its hydra-like sections to bite each other in their rage for truth. The Romans, who were ignorant of the truth, were also ignorant of the pleasure of molesting those who do not possess it. They only became persecutors when they came in contact with the Asiatic religions and under the pressure of an insolence which endangered the Empire. Christianity, having become a force in its turn, persecuted its enemies long and cunningly; conquered after centuries of domination it bequeathed its rage

to a new force, the Revolution, born like itself from the Gospels. The proceedings of the Christians and of the Revolutionaries are identical, and this is comprehensible because the two sects have the same principles and similarly believe themselves to be in possession of that illusory talisman, the truth. As soon as the Christians or the Revolutionaries are in power they light the faggots or erect scaffolds. Whether it operates in England or in France, whether it is frankly or hypocritically Christian, the Revolution proceeds to the sacrifices which are part of its cult. In England it burns the house and manuscripts of Harvey; in France it strikes off the head of Lavoisier. Its sole excuse is that the Church had bequeathed it an illustrious example, and first of all that of Galilei. But the coarse men who imitated the Church greatly exceeded it in cruelty and in unconscious obscurantism. They burned and slew without knowing, at hasard, incapable moreover of suspecting what there was in Harvey's papers and Lavoisier's head. The Church here is greatly superior; it knew what it was doing. It was rather cunning than cruel; it was even courteous. There has never been such polite persecution. Galilei did not suffer in proportion to the glory brought him by his captivity. His great claim to the admiration of fools is that of having been a victim of the Inquisition, as if it were ever glorious to be a victim, that is to say conquered! Galilei did not consider himself a victim; he would have been ashamed to be a victim. His true attitude is very different; far from complaining he praised the

Inquisition's conduct towards him, annoyed that his work was interrupted, satisfied that he was treated honourably, that during the trial a palace and not a prison was assigned to him as a residence, and that the discussions were decent. Perhaps he boasts that he suffered less than he did suffer; admirable pride! . . . .

It would have been enormous if Galilei had risked martyrdom; but one is absolutely forbidden to suppose that he claimed the pity of his contemporaries or of posterity; no, he had even taken precautions not to be a martyr; and he was not accused, he was asked for explanations, he replied without weakness and without bragging. Did he have to retract? It is not known. It is improbable, for his affirmations had been indirect and purely hypothetical. It is known that he did not utter the melodramatic phrase: *E pur si muove.* He scorned to insist. In those times there was no scientific proselytising; on the contrary, the tendency was to hide the secrets of nature from the vulgar. Whether the people knows or does not know the true movements of the stars is of no importance, for a truth or an error are equally inert in the hands of the people. . . .

Galilei was a real scientist. Therefore he only asserted doubtfully and disdainfully. The dialogues contain the for and against. He believed in the system of Copernicus and his calculations had increased its probability. Obliged to dissimulate, he did so with a smile, yielding nobly to that force: stupidity, giving a memorable proof of the disinterestedness of proud minds. To be disinterested from



truth, is not that the supreme effort? Galilei's grandeur is there, and not in his legendary state of a victim, not in an impulse of anger, in the remark of a woman who always wants to be right.

This is an excellent story of persecution which would make one think that civilisation perhaps did not gain much when the justice of the people was substituted for the justice of the Church. But then, it is always a pleasure to change tyrannies; one must not hope for more.

The people are moral from cupidity and credulity. They hate and envy the great whose morals are impure. Madame de Lamballe was supposed to be a tribad; that was why her charming head was cut off and insulted. To-day socialism, the popular party, declaims frequently against prostitution, a consequence of the capitalist regime, according to these poor brains! After all, from prostitution, license, irregularity, almost all our literature and art were born. Prostitution is the "sacred lake", the divine marsh where the beautiful white flowers grow. But skill is needed to gather them. . . .

In less strict times M. Renan would have been, not canonized, for he was not heroic, but fitted with some title to piety. He had every right to become Venerable, like so many other more modest heretics, like the blessed Joachim, Abbot of Flora, for whom he felt a tender sentiment. His dream was to be a bishop, but, in view of the pretentions of the modern Roman Church he altered it to a Protestant

bishop, a profession which can be exercised, he said, without believing in God. I think Renan was deceived and that the most free-thinking of Protestant bishops in our days believes in God and in Christian morality, his eldest daughter, as firmly as the most devout of Catholic bishops. Faith has made great progress during the nineteenth century, the great theological century. Never was belief so widely spread through all classes of society, and to-day this culture is bearing its fruits. The other day, there was perhaps not one unbeliever around the statue of that great sceptic.

What characterises Renan is scepticism, the absolute scepticism of the man of method who can only admit as provisionally true what is presented to him as such by his method. He rejects tomorrow what he accepted yesterday, he has no principles but that of the permanent examination of all things. Renan's scepticism was sometimes rather aggressive under an appearance of good nature; the true sceptic cannot refrain from a noble impatience at the universal credulity. Renan translated this feeling by a phrase which will never be famous because it wounds the people in their sentiments and even more in their needs: "The horrible mania for certainty."

Few persons in Europe can understand that the world has become the people, and the people need beliefs. They are not, and rightly, very fastidious about their quality. That is what matters least. There is neither truth nor error; there are only motives for acting. Everything is true which stimulates the diverse human activities. What

does it matter to the workmen that the palace they build is useless; and how make them understand that very inutility by which they live; therefore we should respect popular beliefs, and turn them in a direction where the public good may be benefitted. Renan, who did not believe in the truth of Christianity, admitted its social utility. After having contributed towards removing Christ's halo, he would have brought his offering, like Voltaire, towards the building of a Church. In everything that great mind knew how to make allowance for aristocracies. It would not have displeased him to see a rich incredulous clergy reigning over a labourious and believing people. At the same time that he was Renan he was Voltaire, but a Voltaire of better deportment, more indulgent and more social.

This attitude would be difficult to take up to-day. It would have been hard for him to keep it himself if he had lived to extreme old age. It is now greatly decried and he valued a universal middling esteem, impossible to conciliate with an ironic and benevolent scepticism now that the people "think". One of his best literary disciples, M. Anatole France, has resolutely made his choice and cast himself into the populace; another has frankly inclined towards the old ideas. Called upon to choose, M. Renan would have been very unhappy.

Life is becoming more and more harsh for men who have gradations in their intelligence. And Renan was all gradations. Verlaine's *Art poétique* is Renanism. Will these men resign themselves, not to believe, which is impossible

for them, but to seem to believe? Perhaps they will not be forced to do so, for the men of gradations have not usually a taste for martyrdom.

M. Renan, and this finishes off the happiness of his physiognomy, which in turn increases its dignity, was never a martyr. He held to his ideas, but with an honourable moderation. When his intimate convictions were preserved and plainly asserted, he was the man of concessions and conciliations, the man of gradations, Montaigne, for he may be also compared with Montaigne. Besides, this excellent mind would have lived without too much difficulty in any of our recent centuries. In the sixteenth century he would have confessed to Huguenot tendencies, soon repressed either from contempt, like Rabelais or Erasmus, or from prudence, like several others. He would then have become one of those extraordinary bishops who no longer said mass, smiled at the sacraments, studied Hebrew and presided over processions. In the seventeenth century his situation would have been more difficult, especially under the reign of Bossuet; but no, he would have been a bolder and more brilliant Fénelon, more difficult to conquer, perhaps a victorious Fénelon exiling his rival to Meaux.

It would be an error to think that I am animated by a fanatical hatred against Protestantism. Fanaticism is unknown to me. I have no more hatred for Protestantism than a doctor has for malaria; and I consider Protestantism precisely as a most distressing spiritual malaria. It is not

that I profess a much more lively tenderness for Catholicism, as it is practised to-day; but it is less offensive to me, it is a fact, no doubt because I am used to it. In studies of this kind we must always take into account the critic's original religion, for it may have a double and contrary effect, whether it renders him more indulgent or increases his severity; this depends on temperaments, psychological tendencies, certain general principles adopted by the mind. As to the religions criticised, and the same phenomenon occurs in connection with philosophical systems or moral methods, they always imagine that the critic is stirred by a particular and even personal animosity. Beetles, a fabulist would say, imagine a great hatred of their race in the insect-hunter who pursues them; but the hunter only feels curiosity and merely desires to enrich his collection. I do not think that at the Pasteur Institute they hate the microbes of the marshy fever.

Superstition interests me greatly; so much so, that I find a difficulty in enduring the pretence of a religion to be free. Therefore I sought, with a certainty of finding it, the form it takes on in Protestantism, and I demonstrated that superstitious belief, instead of being scattered over a multitude of secondary gods, is concentrated and fixed on a single god called Jesus or Christ. I gave a few examples, I could have given many more, if I had not been afraid that it would be boring to insist. But, when the method is known, everybody can now corroborate my hypothesis by going through the dreary literature I have

turned over myself. In this way there would be absolutely verified a little discovery of which I am rather proud, for it confirms the general law that nothing is lost, but that everything is transformed; the Jewish prophet or the Protestant pietist who brings everything back to God follows a method which differs only in appearance from that of the pagan or Catholic devotee who distributes limited functions to different gods. To pray to Jesus or Saint Anthony of Padua are equivalent superstitions, and the second is no more unreasonable than the first, for if there exists an almighty, conscious god possessed of free-will, surrounded by the elect, one does not see why he should not utilize these idle elect by conferring certain powers on them. The cult of the saints is marvellously logical, and once the supernatural is admitted as unassailable as the very polytheism from which it derives and of which it is only a modification.

Carried into the philosophical field, the question would be that of the unity or the multiplicity of forces. Theoretically it is easy to bring back all these forces to a single force and all bodies to a single body; but that is a purely mental concept and in scientific practice we have to reckon with the multiplicity of forces and the multiplicity of bodies. No doubt the belief in unity is only a synthetic illusion. We lend the world that unity we attribute to ourselves, and it is only an illusion. Man has only one soul, his own soul; the world has only one soul, God or the unique Force. These are dreams wherein it is wise not to

participate, for the world is not a mere human representation; there are as many worlds as on earth there are animal species and different nervous systems.

I have not been writing these Epilogues for ten years and this is the third time I have been obliged to write the words, which are becoming the refrain of a litany: "The War". Therefore, being an animal wholly subject to experience, humble before the laws of nature, to my great regret I see myself forced to consider the pacifists as Utopians like those who dream of entering into conversation with the Martians, or of abolishing pain (and hence pleasure), or of increasing intelligence by multiplying primary schools. Humanity dreams, believing that a dream must hatch if it is dreamed long enough, as an egg hatches if it is brooded long enough. To think of the bedizened men who are exchanging phrases over a green table at the Hague!

The Europeans, says Schopenhauer roughly, work six days a week in order to have the right of being bored on the seventh. That is the Anglo-Saxon Sunday. The Sunday of the nations with a Latin civilisation has always been a little less dreary; but in the last few years it has tended to grow gloomier. Several leagues or associations are working towards it, some of which are frankly and others hypocritically pious. In reality, the object is to please the

"Old Jew" and to flatter him by restoring its traditional indolence to the seventh day.

Rest is necessary and I wish to all people those long hours of leisure during which life seems suspended. But it is not necessary for this rest to be unanimous and these leisures collective. Since true rest consists in watching others work, for there are no sensations except by contrast, it would be good if in social life there were two shifts, turn by turn active and indolent. The solution of the weekly rest is in rotation and not in suspension of work.

There are activities independent of the public; they can be stopped periodically without anybody suffering. There are others which are dependent on the public; they cannot be so. Let post-office clerks be given frequent leave; I should think it an excellent thing. But not to shut the post-offices.

There is the principle as it applies to all activities, not industrial but commercial. Let us beware of the English Sunday, the Biblical Sunday.

PHILOSOPHICAL EXCURSIONS

[PROMENADES PHILOSOPHIQUES: PREMIER SERIE]

1905

THE saint is above all the man who suffices himself, the admirable egoist who only needs not to live in order to be happy. Lifted from the earth and suspended between the infinite and tangible reality, he moves away little by little from the natal centre, mounts upward and unites with the divine. Unites with and not dissolves in; the saint always has a well-marked personality, he is always original and sometimes so strange that during his lifetime he disconcerts people of good will. Having no need of men, he evolves outside social conditions; he is sometimes above his time and always beside it. Fearing nothing and secretly desiring death, the saint is so free that

we can scarcely understand such a state of liberty. And then since he desires nothing human, refuses beforehand any share in known joys, is the additional guest who, already fed, watches the others' meal, he is only capable of disinterested and benevolent sentiments; perhaps it is love which marks the limit between the saints and the stoics and the cynics.

These traits are a little general and perhaps they may be thought too exclusive; indeed they apply rather to the mystic and contemplative saint than to the martyr or the hospitaller, but I think the true saint is inactive, since action is a human enjoyment.

It is well known that the calendar of saints is a mixed one. It contains a great many martyrs, persons who displayed great firmness when placed in a difficult position; it contains phantoms, saints born from a verbal deformation, from a mistaken reading, from a legend, from a popular tale; there are favourite saints, canonized for reasons of state; a great many others were directly elected by the people, much as the crowd to-day chooses a representative: Saint Columban, a great founder of monasteries, was a real man of politics, much dreaded by the kings of Austrasia. Without reducing the state of holiness to the state of fakirism, we may admit that the saint is above everything contemplative.

The solitaries are most seductive. Before Robinson Crusoe, they lived as islanders, having chosen an isle situated in infinity. Saint Anthony, the model hermit, has

remained famous and a little ridiculous. His story should be read in the journey of Saint Jerome and especially the page where he receives the visit of the hermit Paul; it is one of the most pathetic incidents in Christian literature. Simeon through his eccentricities popularised the mania for pillar-hermits. To live on the top of a column was looked upon as an act of great wisdom. Many pillar-hermits became idiots; Simeon swayed continuously in the manner of certain dervishes and sang; people travelled great distances to contemplate him and crowds camped around his pyramid.

The pillar hermitage had been chosen for the certainty of isolation it offered, nothing being more difficult to find than a true solitude, even in a harsh desert world. The despairing hermits fled, fled for ever before the veneration which attracted to them the people and imitators. Most of the hermitages became the nucleuses of monasteries. Later there were recluses, voluntary prisoners who had themselves walled up in a cellar.

I do not know whether the solitaries were true contemplatives. It is probable that very few of them had sufficiently strong minds to resist solitude. The temptations of Saint Anthony are the legend of a truth. According to Saint Jerome, the one human desire of Anthony was to eat a piece of bread, after he had lived on dates for more than sixty years; other hermits had more vulgar desires, and many who sought a life of peace and silence found in their caverns only uneasiness and the neighings of the flesh.

It is pleasant to see them in old pictures bowed over a skull; although in those rough ages there were no doubt plenty of skulls lying about, we must only see in this a symbol, though a rather terrible one. In some epochs life was so terrible to the weak that the idea of death was confounded with the idea of life itself.

The true contemplatives lived in the cloisters, sheltered by the gentle monastic civilsation; and the greatest lived in the cloisters of cities, like Hugues, like Richard and the Victorins who raised mystic philosophy to such a height. Thought and even silence are only possible in the midst of men.

The saints have necessarily practised poverty, since wealth is what man desires most, and since the saint does nothing like other men. Francis of Assisi first made poverty a sort of nobility. On the day he stripped himself of all his garments in the midst of the people, there was seen, perhaps for the first time, a man whose action was in harmony with his thought. The most truthful among the most convinced often allow some concessions between them, and it was already a fine thing for the life of a reformer not to be the direct negation of his principles. Doubtless, since thought and action, although born of the same generator, evolve along divergent planes, such a harmony is not indispensable, but a bad logical education makes us look upon it as very agreeable; we are so unaccustomed to it that the surprise might intoxicate us. Saint Francis's act might have been perhaps the beginning of a revolution

in morals, if morals were not eternally determined by human nature. Yet he palliated their illogicality for a little, by creating a vast fraternity which for a few years carried everywhere the example of social disinterestedness and spiritual care. The friars, successors to the monks, had a very different state of mind. They were ignorant, even of the breviary (which Saint Francis did not insist on), worked little and at domestic tasks, and soon fell into mendicity. Far from being a creative force, the Franciscans after the death of their founder rose up like a reproach to the opulent Church. In all innocence they prepared the Reformation, and were too weak to oppose the slightest obstacle to the movement. At that moment their task was over; they were nothing more than one of the visible stages in the long secularisation of the religious orders for which the Roman Church has ceaselessly laboured until recent times.

The truth has been very seriously defined: conformity of the representation of an object with that object itself. But that settles nothing. What is the object itself, since we can only know it in the state of representation? It is useless to carry the discussion further. We should circle indefinitely around the fortress of idealism, without ever finding a gap, a weak spot; we shall never enter it, since no argument can break down its powerful walls.

Yet we must concentrate our thoughts. Having long reflected, we shall ask ourselves if this fortress is real, or

whether on the contrary it is not a representation without an object; a pure phantom, like those towns overwhelmed by the sea whose bells still ring at the great festivals, but only for those who believe in their mysterious life. This doubt will incline us to go over again the reasoning of Berkeley and Kant and to examine whether it is well constructed. Does it start from the senses to terminate in the mind? Or, on the other hand, might it not be one of those conceptions of the mind which fall back on the senses like an avalanche and freeze and stifle them?

How were the senses formed? That is the question. Has there always been an opposition between the ego and the non-ego? There is nothing in the intelligence which was not before in the senses. By intelligence we must understand psychological consciousness in this philosophical dictum, which is due to Locke. Let us drop consciousness, which only serves to complicate the problem. Consciousness is a second-order phenomenon and of merely sentimental utility when restricted to man; it is banal and purely reflex when extended to all sentient matter. Let us consider this matter in what are perhaps its humblest manifestations, taking into account only actions and reactions, exactly as we should observe the influence of heat, light or cold on milk, wine or water. Yet in living matter there will be something more. Decomposition will be compensated by assimilation, and if assimilation is abundant there will be generation; other forms, similar to the first, will be detached from the matrix form. This represents life essen-

tially, since a living being is limited in duration by the very fact of its growth which constitutes a labour and a wearing-away. Let us look at a being whose senses are not differentiated, and let us see how it behaves towards the rest of the world, how it knows it.

The amoeba has no exterior senses; it is an almost homogeneous mass, and yet it is sensitive to almost the same sensorial impressions as the highest mammal. It feeds (smell and taste); it moves (sense of space, touch); it is sensitive to the light, at least to certain rays (sight); the environment in which it lives is in perpetual movement, continually traversed by waves of sound, and no doubt it reacts to these vibrations (hearing). Perhaps it even possesses, without any special organs, senses which are lacking to us and which we shall only discover by study and analysis, such as the chemical sense which estimates the composition of a body, declares it capable of assimilation or advises its rejection. The exercise of all these senses proves first of all a very long heredity; doubtless they were only acquired successively unless their presence is the strict consequence of the life of this humble creature, since the absence of one of them might be a cause of death. But it is useless to build up hypotheses on this subject; it is sufficient to stick to the fact, and that fact is the existence of a living being without differentiated organs, that is to say all of whose parts are equally apt to react against every exterior excitement.

Why these reactions? They are one of the conditions

of life. But could not life be conceived of without them? It is possible. It is a matter of environment. If the environment in which the amoeba lived was homogeneous and calm, if its temperature and luminosity were constant, if it provided suitable food in abundance, if the animal, to cut it short, lived in an alimentary bath, no reactions would be necessary; and its only movements would be to open its pores to food, to cast out the excess, and to divide itself, when it swelled, into two amoebas. Why then does it possess all these senses which, although not organised, are perfectly real? Because the environment compels them by its instability. The senses, whether they are differentiated, or whether they are spread over the whole surface of a living form, are the creation of the environment, and of an environment which, light, sound, material externality, odours, etc., acts according to different discontinuous manifestations; constant or continuous they would be without effect, but when discontinuous make themselves felt. Discontinuous light has created the eye, as dripping water creates a hole in granite.

A being whatever it may be, whether vague and almost amorphous, or clearly defined, is not isolated in the universal vital environment, it is the molecule of a diapason. It vibrates, not of itself, but in obedience to a general motion. The living cell, itself in motion internally and subject to all the actions of exterior motion, no doubt only perceives that motion as a single impression. But when several cells join together, live in permanent contact, the

impressions of exterior movement begin to be perceived, differentiated. Therefore this is necessary? Therefore there already exist luminous vibrations, different from sound vibrations? Certainly, since otherwise the sensorial differentiation would be inexplicable, since it is useless. The union of several cells allows the animal to divide its labour of perception and to present to every perceptible manifestation an organ, or at least the beginning of an organ, appropriate to receive it.

It is true that from the idealist point of view we might suppose that the senses are a creation of the individual, an enlargement of his own life, and that he differentiates his kinetic impressions on his own initiative. That would be a phonomenon of spontaneous analytic creation, the analysing instrument pre-existing the matter analysed, or even, for extreme idealists, creating that matter according to needs determined once for all by his own physiology. It would therefore be a property of organised living matter to fabricate senses and thus to diversify its own life. It is not easy to admit this point of view for several, purely physical reasons.

First of all, if this sensorial differentiation were a faculty of living matter we should not see it limited in its powers, as it is. Even if we admit certain senses unknown to man, such as the chemical sense, the electric sense, the sense of direction (extremely doubtful), we yet see that the number of senses is very limited. But, the fundamental senses are identical in most of the higher species, verte-

brates and insects, with very few exceptions; as soon as the animal reaches sensorial differentiation, that differentiation takes place in response to the manifestations of matter.

Therefore the senses must correspond to exterior realities. They have been created, not by the perceiving being, but by the perceptible environment. Light has created the eye, just as in our houses it has created windows. In an environment without light, fish become blind. This is perhaps the direct proof, for if the light is the creation of the eye, that creation could take place at the bottom of the seas, just as well as at the surface of the earth. Another proof; these same fish, become blind, but yet needing a luminous habitat, create in the darkness of the ocean abysses, not eyes, but apparatuses directly productive of light; and that artificial light creates the atrophied eye anew. The senses are therefore the product of the environment; they cannot moreover be anything else, since their utility is nil if the environment is not perceptible. It might be again objected that the nervous system, having the intuition of an environment to perceive, creates organs fitted for that perception. But there is a *petitio principii* here; for, either the nervous system is conscious of the exterior environment and therefore already has senses; or it has no senses and cannot be conscious of the environment. A more serious objection would be that, if the sensorial aptitude were a property of the nervous system, it would afterwards create organs to perceive more distinctly, and well differentiated, the different natural

phenomena. This way of looking at it would explain to a certain extent the creation of the sensorial organs, but not the existence of the senses themselves considered as sensitive power. It explains the eye of the vertebrate, but not the amoeba's sensitiveness to luminous rays. Moreover it is established that the nervous system acts rather by tyrannising the organs at its disposal than by trying to modify those organs or to create new ones. This is a power which is evidently beyond it. On the contrary this power has devolved upon exterior phenomena which, by acting mechanically on living matter, produce local modfications in it. The organs of the senses seem to be nothing more than surfaces made sensitive by the very agents which, when the labour is achieved, will reflect therein their particular physiogonomy. The eye, let it be repeated, is a creation of light.

Since they are the work of the principle general phenomena, the senses must accord exactly, excepting approximation, with the nature of the environment which created them. The luminous environment therefore is not a dream, but a reality, preexisting the eye which perceives it; and the objects situated in that luminous environment must be perceived by the eye under the form of an exact image, since the eye is the work of light itself, as the gimlet which creates a hole creates it strictly to its size, its form, its image.

Art and science are equally useful in a civilisation. M.

Edmond Perrier summarily establishes the superiority of science. "The true higher culture," he says, "can only be given by science. However decorative artists, men of letters and poets may be to a strong nation, they are its charm and amenity, but not its force and life." And, he goes on, the too exclusive esteem for literature and art is a sign that sensibility is being elevated at the expense of the intelligence; it is a sign of decadence.

If that were wholly true, seeing that science was outlined a few centuries ago and provisionally founded only a few years ago, there would be no civilisations before our own or different from it. The relativity of knowledge does not permit such an assertion; the scientific culture of to-day will perhaps in the future appear puerile and vain. If it is a question of good will, of the desire to know, all the ages have shown an almost equal ardour. Science has always been; what changes is its object.

But it is not historically that I see and desire to state anew the question of the antinomy between art and science. The contrasts which are easily made to-day, might be reconstructed for given European or Asiatic periods. The conflict is permanent, because it has its source in the very organisation of the human being. Man wishes to live and man wishes to know. Far from these two tendencies being complementary and mutually strengthening, they deny each other. Schopenhauer made this eternal struggle the basis of his metaphysics; recently M. Jules de Gaultier has given precision to this point of view by showing the an-

tagonism between the vital instinct and the instinct for knowledge.

Granted this, and it is essential to grant it, what does art respond to, and what science?

In art we shall naturally include all aesthetic manifestations, including play in its multiple forms, literature in its widest sense, and a considerable part of science, that part which handles notions and not facts, and which is clouded with sentimentality (such as vulgar sociology). Into science would go all the rest, that is to say the ponderable and measurable immensity.

One of these two domains corresponds very well with sensibility, and the other with the intelligence; here the vital instinct, there the instinct for knowledge. Art includes everything which stimulates the desire to live; science includes everything which sharpens the desire to know. Art, even the most disinterested, the most disembodied, is the auxiliary of life; born of sensibility, it sows and creates sensibility in its turn; it is the flower of life and, like seed, gives life in turn. Science, or under a vaster term, knowledge, has its end in itself with all idea of life and of the propagation of the species set aside. That sublimation of sensibility, the intelligence, the organ of the need to know, is sterilised sensibility. To know, to know ever more; the instinct for knowledge is insatiable, because the subject of knowledge is limitless.

Art and literature which appear to be the luxury of the genius of the species are, on the contrary, its daily food.

Their quality is a matter of indifference if they are considered as gains, as stimulants. Their charms have little by little subdued to regular marriage that polygamous animal, the human male. And it is precisely when art declines, when the dreams of felicity it suggests are no longer sufficiently strong to dupe sensibility, that natural polygamy regains the upper hand, which weighs down the flight of life. Religions, those primitive and always superior forms of art, are powerful vital aphrodisiacs. Those which defend chastity are perhaps those which labour most directly towards the maintenance of life; for to speak against love or in favour of love is precisely the same thing. Nations without religion, without art, without letters, to a great extent would escape the tyranny of the vital instinct. They would still reproduce themselves, but with declining vigour. This may be well seen in France where the regions which are becoming sterile are those which the modern forms of civilisation have deprived of religion, art and literature at the same time; while the yet fertile regions, like Brittany, are still living in an ideality of religion and poetry.

But it is not only the absence of art which dries up the nations; almost all animals do without it, and their fecundity is often extreme, solely in relation to the fecundity of the soil, that is to say the abundance of food. Perhaps in certain very positive races comfort can replace music, dancing, songs, processions, fairs, indulgences, hymns of praise, legends and tales. Still there remains a void; if it is filled

by the instinct for knowledge, if too large a part of the sensibility is transformed into intelligence, life is definitely conquered.

I do not mean to say that this result would be bad. Nor at the moment do I either consider it as good. It is indifferent. The question is simply to know whether art or science keep the lamp of life alight.

To understand the part of science clearly, pure science must be separated from applied science. There has always been a practical science; its development does not follow that of theoretical science, but that of wealth; it also becomes more important as wealth is mobilised and as men perfect the methods of utilisation which may increase its power a hundred-fold. The great practical discoveries are scarcely ever scientific; they are empirical. The greatest useful invention of the nineteenth century, steam, was made long before the theory of steam was created; science perfected, it did not discover. There was one other invention which was more important than that of steam, printing, a work of the middle ages; there never was a less scientific discovery. Doubtless Pasteur's theory seems to have worked for and not against life, although perhaps its beauty surpasses its utility; but would anyone dare to assert that chemistry would have been created by the vital genius, if such geniuses existed and if they were conscious?

Science would not labour for life by ceasing to be pure, by associating parasitical sentiments with its wholly intellectual preoccupations. A scientist who falsifies an experi-

ment because he thinks the result would be disastrous to humanity may be a very moral person but he is not a true scientist. Science desires to know and to communicate knowledge. To know, to know ever more. Intelligence is the luxury of life, a dangerous luxury for life which it contemplates with the eyes of Medusa and the Basilisk; science is the food of the intelligence.

If anything really represents the dream, it is science. It handles life, slays or fortifies it impartially, according to the hazard of its researches. And what does science seek? An illusion. Truth. It seeks truth, knowing very well it will not be found. Its disinterestedness, from which life revolts, is admirable and absurd. To know, and to what end? To know, to know still more! To go on, not higher, for the universe has neither height nor depth, but to go further on while knowing that this further on represents the diameter of a particle of dust compared with that of the visible universe. What is there beyond the molecule—nothing or a world, an abstraction or a recommencement? Is matter something? Or is it a conception of the mind? In either case it is divisible to infinity. Science says no, and it is dreaming. When it says yes, its dream will change its subject like that of the sleeper who turns on his back. And so it will go on from dream to dream until it has worn out, not the unwearable material of knowledge, but the material for knowing, the human brain.

Science is the only truth and it is the great lie. It knows nothing, and people think it knows everything. It is calum-

niated. People think that science is electricity, automobilism and dirigible balloons. It is something very different. It is life devouring itself, it is sensibility transforming itself into intelligence, it is the need to know stifling the need to live, it is the genius of knowledge vivisecting the vital genius.

We read regularly in the list of claims formulated by the dockyards the following clause: "Suppression of bounties for capability." But do people read these things, or, if they do read them how can they do so without astonishment?

Those who are not in close touch with life are liable to such surprises. Suddenly there rise before their eyes or sound in their ears phrases which imply principles of which their minds have not the slightest suspicion; and events appear enigmatic to them. We know the idea of equality. We think we know it and we accept it. It is one of the most perverse by which men can be allured; its malevolence is capable of destroying the whole of civilisation.

This idea, as it is vulgarly conceived, seems to have limits, although we see its domain increase from day to day. Equality was civil; people came to terms with it, because it was not so much a matter of individuals as of their rights, and it all took place on the frontiers of abstraction. But equality is tending to become social; it is about to operate, not on rights or facts or things, but is going to attack individuals themselves and to level them down even in their

physiology, even in their natural aptitudes. That is the meaning of the words, telegraphed from Brest or Toulon: "Abolition of bounties for capability."

It is moreover the very basis of socialism; it is socialism's secret doctrine.

After the struggle against acquired or transmitted privileges, we shall see the struggle against natural privileges.

Socialism, in fact, declares war on nature and on science, which is only nature's interpreter; it does not deny inequality as a universal fact; but in the practice of life it aspires to pay no attention to this and to realise the stupid popular axiom: "One man is as good as another."

It is very easy to understand that in a workshop the strongest or the ablest or the most industrious workman is envied by the others if these qualities bring him increased wages; but hitherto this sentiment was hidden like a vice, which it is. Envy remained sly; now it raises its head and formulates aphorisms. The workers of Brest, still naïve in spite of their blusterings, sought and found a corrective to their immoral claim; they did not dare, as others have dared, to confess brutally their hatred of talent, of "capability", and they add: "because these bounties are only given through favouritism." But we know this formula; it is lying about everywhere, and merely means that he who employs it either still possesses some traces of modesty or supposes that some still remain in the cowardly masters to whom he addresses his request.

"One workman is as good as another." I have heard

something worse and more scandalous: "One author is as good as another." The young man who uttered that was not stupid; he too was envious, hiding the ugliness of his sentiments under a theory.

However we must not see only baseness of heart in this; there is corruption of mind as well. Thousands of men think in this way to-day and perhaps we shall have to reckon with them, although it appears humiliating. Let us reflect, for the time when we shall have to make up our minds to it, that, upon the whole, they are only guilty of an excess of logic.

However good logic may be, it is always worthless when the principles are bad; that is why, before we accept any principle, we should examine it with care, in accordance with Descartes's recommendation. From an idea so false, so anti-natural, so anti-scientific as the idea of equality we can draw nothing but senseless conclusions by the most rigid logic. So the guilty ones are not the workers of Brest or of Toulon, nor the common run of socialists today. We must go higher up, to those abstraction-mongers of the eighteenth century who set about building systems on Man, forgetting that there were men. Joseph de Maistre first noted this aberration when he said: "I have travelled much, I have seen many men; I have never met Man."

Man, that word which is only a convenient synthesis, an abbreviation—the dreamers of all ages have thought they touched him. This hallucination which has brought us the Declaration of the Rights of Man, will perhaps some day

bring us Collectivism, that state where we shall at last see realised with dreadful seriousness that ideal of the bad workman: "The suppression of bounties to capacity."

However, even in the depths of minds which are the most corrupted by socialist false humility there is that eternal will to power of which Nietzsche has spoken so well. The basest man aspires to less baseness; there is no life so mediocre but has its ambition, no obvious inaptitude but feels it has a secret capacity.

If perfect equality were ever established it would be a burden so heavy for human nature that human nature would either throw it off or be crushed by it.

The landscapes of France or of Italy or of England or of every country with an old and profound civilisation are the work of men. They represent the aesthetic aspect of a purely utilitarian labour. That lone tree which grows so well towards the middle of that long meadow was not planted there for the pleasure of the eyes; its purpose is to be a trunk where the cattle will come to rub their sides. This tree has two purposes, useful for a cow, beautiful for a painter, and it is the image of all the landscapes we call natural. There are no natural landscapes. Those which seem to us the least prepared are almost as much arranged as parks laid out with science and perseverance. Only their preparation was unconscious of the aesthetic end which they attained in addition. Far from being natural, they are the products of a double artifice.

The innocent citizens who, on their exodus to the seaside, travel through Normandy by rail, imagine that this land of trees, grass and wheat always looked as it now does; they think the landscape smiling and bestow their blessings on Nature. Here it is man who must be admired; he has done with Nature, which is a material, what the architect makes with stones—a construction. Normandy is a cleared forest; it is still being cleared and I have seen vast stretches of trees disappear and the country has already taken on the aspect of the most ancient cultivated land.

Some nooks of this region when seen in persepective still look like a forest only interrupted on the slopes; the reason for that is that each field is surrounded with a belt of trees. But very often now they cut down one of these sides to throw two fields into one. The number of trees is diminishing; the dark green tone is growing lighter; the horizon is extending; the landscape is slowly changing.

Everywhere the tree is tending to disappear. It is allowed to grow, but it is no longer cultivated, for its utility daily diminishes in the face of coal and iron. The more civilised and more active a country, the denser its population, the less stable are its landscapes; moreover they depend on a thousand causes, often very distant and seemingly foreign to their evolution.

Thus, a few years ago foreign competition visibly diminished the cultivation of cereals in lower Normandy; hence tiles were substituted for thatch as roofing for cottages; hence in the landscapes a change of aspects, extremely strik-

ing, almost painful to eyes habituated to the softness of these straw roofs whose tone, which soon became that of dead leaves, harmonised marvellously with the general colour-scheme. The red tile which is gay in Italy is dreary in Normandy.

I have forgotten whether it was Amiel or M. Bourget who said that a landscape is a state of mind. This idealistic conception of the exterior world is exact and at the same time very pretty. We contemplate ourselves in the spectacle of things, our memories, our desires, our habits. There are some landscapes, dreadful or insignificant for others, which for us are delightful; and for us it would be painful to see them embellished. It is also painful to see a beautiful landscape ruined by a clumsy or grasping hand. But we must tell ourselves that such an occurrence is inevitable; that the present aspect of things is only a moment in evolution, that yesterday they were different and that tomorrow they will again be different.

Sites disappear; others are created. That nasty little railway station, devoid of taste and style, becomes an element of beauty in the landscape which at first it made ugly. The viaduct which strides across the valley gives it the interesting air of a difficulty conquered, and the flowing stream, which is used to that occupation, leaps not without pride under the wheel which pounds it.

Everywhere where there is life, there is beauty.

In spite of appearances, Sainte-Beuve was practically

the only critic of the nineteenth century, the only creator of literary values.

Sainte-Beuve determined the characters of almost all the French writers and of the men and women who played an intellectual part between the Renaissance and the middle of the nineteenth century.

What is a theologian? An a priorist. What is Kant! An a priorist. Philosophy from Plato to Buffon was a priori. It it no longer so. A priori philosophy is as much out of date as dogmatic, eschatological or mystic theology.

There is no pure Reason any more than there are mountains of crystal.

Logic is the product of facts, not the producer of facts. But the facts are not all known, especially by those who adopt the profession of philosopher. . . .

Goethe's value as a scientist has long been disputed and is not yet unanimously recognised. A poet who studies natural history is inevitably considered a mere amateur in science, and the last to do him justice are precisely those who are scientifically incompetent. . . .

The glory of Herbert Spencer was that he brought the idea of evolution into philosophy.

The contemplation of a cage of monkeys is very useful

for an understanding of humanity. All civilisation came from that necessity for movement which torments the Primates.

From stupidity, from vanity, from incapacity for thinking, above all from the necessity for food, civilised humanity works far too much, and its dignity is not increased thereby; on the contrary.

Leisure, so useful to superior men, is fatal to the people.

There are often several men in one man, several even contradictory minds in the same mind.

The transvaluation of values must not become a paradoxical or brutal game. A certain prudence is necessary, a certain gentleness.

LITERARY EXCURSIONS SECOND SERIES

[PROMENADES LITTERAIRES: DEUXIEME SERIE]

1906

ROMANTICISM, I think, may be defined as the predominance of sentiment over reason. Even the dialectic Romantics, like Jean Jacques Rousseau or Michelet, do not escape this definition. It would leave on the frontier a poet like Alfred de Vigny; on the other hand, it would include a philosopher who, like Théodore Jouffroy, allowed his reason to tremble with the shuddering of his nerves. We have known many sorts of Romantics. There were wild and gentle ones. The scale descends from Victor Hugo to Gérard de Nerval. Yet scarcely one of them, not even Alfred de Musset, abdicated all reason; the maddest among them had his hours of wisdom,

I mean hours when his intelligence regained control over his sensibility. There was only one exception—George Sand.

Since French literature and thought have existed, that is for nearly one thousand years, almost all the great European minds have had some of their roots in intellectual France. Dante was reared on our poets and theologians. Our *Chansons de geste* produced their last flowers in the lyrical or ironic epics of Ariosto, Cervantes, Tasso; Shakespeare took his philosophy from Montaigne, and the doubt which grimaces in *Hamlet* is that which smiles in the *Essays;* Descartes taught Spinoza his discipline; our scholastic theology terminated in Kant and died with him, just as our classic genius had its last blossoming in Goethe; Schopenhauer built up his great metaphysical drama from the bitter observations of our moralists, Pascal and La Rochefoucauld. Stendhal and Gobineau were among the masters of Nietzsche.

During the Revolution and the Empire there was such trepidation, so much brutalising, that the most violent drugs were necessary. French writers did not seem sufficiently insensate to the new democracy. They discovered Ann Radcliffe in England and intoxicated themselves with *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* and *The Confessional of the Black Penitents,* novels which are perfect models of sanguinary madness and anti-Catholic frenzy. They discovered Lewis and his *Monk,* Maturin and his *Melmoth,*

less mean productions whose value was overestimated. All his life Balzac was haunted by Melmoth, a sort of Wandering Jew whose fate is to live eternally on condition of handing over a soul to the devil from time to time. Merimée took some of his stories from the *Monk;* for example, the *Venus d'Ille* was inspired by the episode of the *Bloody Nun,* which others have utilized. It was also in the *Monk* that Victor Hugo discovered the Frollo of *Notre Dame de Paris,* and the romance of the fair and tender Imogene which makes one character of the *Misérables.*

The literary taste of Balzac, that great creator of human types, was so uncertain that he thought Ann Radcliff's novels "admirable", that he compared Lewis's novels with *La Chartreuse de Parme,* that he called Maturin "one of the greatest geniuses of Europe" and named him between Molière and Goethe.

Balzac died at fifty-one and had ceased to write for three years. His mind developed slowly and scarcely conceived anything creditable before the age of thirty. His was also a confused mind, and his work is confused work, a noble river fed by too many poisoned streams. Balzac's literary life was a perpetual struggle against bad influences, as his social life was against bad luck.

Nobody, even in the time of Mme. de Maintenon, was severe to La Fontaine for the lightness of his morals; neither the Duchesse de Bouillon, nor the Prince de Conti who

preferred him to the throne of Poland, nor Turenne, nor Father Bouhours, nor Maucroix, a churchman and a faithful friend, nor the Abbé Verger, nor Racine who saw him, perhaps with irony, his successor in the bed of Mlle. de Champmeslé.

Liberty of morals, liberty of mind, go together. And here it is not so much a matter of the vigour of physiological functions as of the absence of prejudices. There are certainly close relations between the different functional centres of a human body; there is a relation between sexual energy and intellectual energy. Passivity in the generative apparatus often corresponds with passivity of the brain. But this is not absolute and there are men who are scarcely men at all, whose intelligence acquires marvellous developments as if it were directly swelled by an unutilized force. They might almost be called mysterious developments, for this is almost a phenomenon of disembodiment. The bonds which hold man to animal life are sometimes entirely broken; deprived of sensation, the common food of minds, the intelligence would then perish if it did not find unexpected resources in itself. The world of the senses having failed it, it creates an abstract world and there finds its sustenance. All the great philosophers were thus disembodied, such as Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Nietzsche. An abstract genius is necessarily a chaste genius. Newton is the typical instance. The pure theologians, like Thomas Aquinas, are related to the philosophers; they are the philosophers of a religious civilisation. On the other hand, it is difficult to

include in this category of pure minds either a great poet or a great artist or a great mystic. The chastity of those mystic saints who are most famous for the practice of that negative virtue was an acquired chastity. That does not count, at least in this connection. Saint Theresa was not naturally chaste; to become so, she cultivated her will.

The man of a free mind, if he does not have special plans for himself, considers the acquisition of this Christian virtue a matter of indifference. La Fontaine realised his moral faults, at the moment when death was upon him. "Think how I have lived!" he wrote to Maucroix. Up till then he had lived without thinking for one instant that there is any merit in not living. In La Fontaine there is an exemplary and delicious harmony between the man and the poet.

He was one of the healthiest minds of the seventeenth century. He was ingenuous. Vulgar morality was wholly foreign to him. He only understood natural relations, accepted them as they are. He was near to life like a woman, like a painter; but he had neither the acquired hypocrisy of women nor the vanity of painters. He lived for life's sake; he wrote for writing's sake. He was a poet in the same way that he was a lover; he caressed himself against his poems as against a woman's shoulders. He sought sensations and found a philosophy.

DIALOGUES OF AMATEURS

[DIALOGUES DES AMATEURS]

1907

FESTIVALS, like all human acts, are subject to the principle of utility. A useless festival is incomprehensible. We do not amuse ourselves for the sake of amusing ourselves, we amuse ourselves because it is useful to amuse ourselves. But let us drop amusement. As you were saying, a festival is not necessarily an amusement. The most popular festival in Paris is the festival of the dead; it is useful to sensibility. Freed from painful memories during the rest of their time, men go about their business and their mediocre joys; in a single day, in a single excursion, they get rid of their duties to those who are no more. But for believers the utility is much greater, since prayers on that consecrated day are particularly efficacious in liberating souls from Purgatory. All religious festivals are solemn incantations. The gods must be touched if

they have been bad, or they must be thanked if they have been good, so that they may be so yet once more. They are supremely useful. Purely human festivals are no less so. Their first object is practical; the amusement is an addition or a bait. In every festival one gives and another receives. They are not formal ceremonies but markets. Whether the objects sold are oxen or rides on a merry-go-round, old iron or the sight of a colossal woman, festivals are fairs, that is to say meetings of buyers and sellers. Moreover all the facts of social life, even to the facts of sentiment, may be classed under the famous words—supply and demand. To live is to act; to act is to exchange the products of one activity for another product. A festival without a practical object is impossible. The festival is the fair; and the fourteenth of July alone would prove it.

* * *

M. Delarue: Divorce, then, is a remedy.

M. Desmaisons: You think so?

M. Delarue: A solution.

M. Desmaisons: It is an accident added to the others, that is all. There are neither remedies nor solutions. Those who think that divorce heals all the wounds of marriage are as stupid as the newspaper readers who believe in the remedies which cure burns and dropsy at the same time. If I had loved the woman would divorce have consoled me? Without divorce we should none the less have separated. She has not married again, nor have I. In spite of some progress in liberty of morals the field of marriage is too

restricted for those who have been divorced. And then after such a calvary of disgusts it requires great intrepidity to re-marry. It is already very difficult to arrange one's affairs when one is free; it becomes almost impossible when one is in the prisons of the law. Civil marriage is one of the disgraces of civilisation, one of the most odious conquests over evolution. When the obligations of religious marriage were broken, they should have been replaced by nothing. The only sensible marriage is "the comedy-marriage", the contract of association drawn by a notary. This marriage, the marriage of Molière, which seems a theatrical convention, was valid in the old society. You could be married in ten minutes in the presence of a notary and two clerks. People got un-married just as easily. Tallemant relates stories of quantities of people of whom no one knew whether they were married or not. They had the benefit of the doubt even in the severest society. These secret marriages were also called marriages of conscience.

M. Delarue: But when they had been to church?

M. Desmaisons: It was as it is now when you have been before the mayor.

M. Delarue: Yes, but no divorce.

M. Desmaisons: Divorce is a Protestant conquest upon annulment which was canon law, Catholic law. People were divorced just as they are now. There were the same pleasures, the same annoyances, the same disgusts, but morals were arranged in gradations of which we are ignorant. The aristocracy gave the people examples of liberty.

Since then the people have only received examples of submission from the aristocracy, and uniformity reigns in slavery. Men think themselves bold when they demand a widening of divorce from public opinion, and by addressing themselves humbly to that despotic queen they only admit their own weakness and her omnipotence. Free union, divorce by mutual consent. . . .

M. Delarue: They are only ideas. . . .

M. Desmaisons: You call those only ideas? What struck the Emperor of Russia in 1815 was that all Frenchmen had a watch in their waistcoat pocket. To-day they all have ideas in their pocket. One wants to buy an automobile, another wants to be divorced, another would like to be decorated. They call that their ideas. And out of that books are made. Oh! These honest pleadings!

M. Delarue: Honest?

M. Desmaisons: Yes, honest, sincere, and so touching! The naïvete of egotism taken in the act.

M. Delarue: And above all the inability to separate their personal interest from public interest.

M. Desmaisons: Oh! That is very difficult and very rare. And then it demands such constant efforts that there would be no time to make money.

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M. Desmaisons: And do you think those people are very clever who spend the precious time of their life in filling little glass tubes with explosives?

M. Delarue: I think them stupid. And do you think

they are intelligent, those kings and statesmen who go and trample about in the snow at Rambouillet in order to kill rabbits?

M. Desmaisons: No, and frankly . . .

M. Delarue: Well?

M. Desmaisons: Let us be philosophers. Let us admit there are pleasures we do not desire to feel.

M. Delarue: I do not want to be too much of a philosopher, I should like to be able to have a little contempt. . . .

M. Desmaisons: Even if it were only to justify the contempt of others. If the big business gentleman who goes out in the snow to kill rabbits which a gamekeeper kicks toward him, if that M. Jourdain saw you gazing tenderly at those fine Romantic editions you hide . . .

M. Delarue: He shall not see me!

M. Desmaisons: But if he saw you he would think you mad.

M. Delarue: Happiness is killing rabbits.

M. Desmaisons: Ah! How much I esteem the poacher! The man has an occupation, does it well and gets a living out of it. Yet they are persecuted by the rich imbecile who dresses up like a Tyrolese to go and shoot hand-fed pheasants. But the poor poacher has to work at night, he has to set snares, he has to use craft in order to be a hunter, the natural state of man.

M. Delarue: Ah! If we start on the subjects of contradictions! Since game is forbidden to the sick, when the illustrious Tyrolese have killed a great deal of game at

Rambouillet or at Compiègne, they send it to the hospitals. . . .

M. Desmaisons: Do you think it ever reaches the patients?

M. Delarue: Of course not, but the intention is there and that flatters the people.

M. Delarue: Some years ago at the time the big anarchist manifestation was there not a translation made of the acts of St. Maximilian, Martyr? Don't you remember? It is the story of a young Roman who refuses to be a soldier because he is a Christian. He reasons like M. Hervé, with inhuman obstinacy. He will not fight for the Emperor, but he would willingly fight for his God. His country is in heaven, etc. In this edifying piece replace the words Christian, God, heaven, by the words socialist, humanity, proletariat, and you have an episode from our last Court of Assize. Maximilian certainly indulged in anti-militarist propaganda; he wrote on the walls, if he knew how to write.

M. Desmaisons: That is erudition, rather than an argument. Although there may be resemblance between the primitive Christians and the socialists, let us leave the Christians alone. Let us ignore history. History is an old curtain which is drawn on the present. Perhaps the only people who understand anything of life are those who are ignorant or mean to be ignorant of the dramas of the past. Do you think a question is solved by the fact that

it has already occurred before? Since there have been men and societies we have always been face to face with the same problems; granted. But then the study of the past is useless. It only appears so similar to the present because of our impotence to reconstitute it in its true forms. Already the present only appears to us in a very obscure outline; what must it be for those distant times which are only known to us by a few ambiguous inscriptions and by the commentaries of mediocre historians, subject to the most dreary prejudice? It is complete darkness.

M. Delarue: But there are analogies.

M. Desmaisons: The Christians of Rome despised the Roman fatherland and stretched all their desires towards their heavenly fatherland. Today there is no question of a heavenly fatherland, and the socialists who seem to you so similar to the early Christians, in fact only resemble themselves.

M. Delarue: Do you not know that expressions like the Kingdom of Heaven, immortality of the soul, etc., are interpolations? The early Christians, just like the socialists, meant a perfectly earthly and graspable happiness. Their God was to come down one day and establish on earth an empire of felicity. One of the great happinesses they promised themselves was a general massacre of their enemies; and as they almost all belonged to the lower classes, that greatly resembles the future joy of tearing out the guts of the bourgeoisie which intoxicates the socialists so much.

M. Desmaisons: There now, to understand the past, you give it the mask of the present! What did I tell you? Forget history.

M. Delarue: That is not easy.

M. Desmaisons: You must do so. Or at least limit your historical science to the period you can know by tradition alone. That is an effort which may be asked of an intelligent man, since M. Hervé, whose occupation is that of a historian, has been capable of it. Imitate him and make yourself a popular brain, a personality without intellectual or sentimental roots in the past. Suppose that you emerge from darkness. Before the day in which you live and which is still a gloomy dawn, there is black night. Slavery weighed upon mute mankind. There was a first and useless revolt. Slavery has returned as heavily, perhaps more heavily. There must be a new attempt; this time definite immutable happiness must be conquered.

M. Delarue: The reign of the Lord. We are still in the third century.

M. Desmaisons: I prefer that narrow-minded monomaniac, M. Béranger, to the humanitarian aesthetes. He wishes to hide the dazzling backsides of goddesses (the phrase is Voltaire's); the others only allow them to be shown to give the artist the opportunity "of bringing into play the powers of his thought" and "of establishing the joys, the enthusiasm of truth in our mental life".

M. Delarue: Art is what gives disinterested pleasure or

at least pleasure with no immediate utility other than a general excitement.

M. Desmaisons: Obviously. Art, play, alcohol, dancing, sports, all belong to the same order. To divide pleasures into material pleasures and intellectual pleasures is a scholastic amusement. Man is a sensibility and cannot be anything else. Intelligence is only sensibility detached from its root, drying up and on the way towards dying, like cut flowers if we do not renew the water in the vase where they are expiring as they open their hearts and give out the perfume of their souls.

M. Delarue: That is not very clear.

M. Desmaisons: My dear friend, we cannot be clear when we dispense with all commonplaces. Men speak with their intelligences, I should like to speak with my sensibility. It is very difficult. Roses, lilies, carnations, violets are all flowers, greatly differing among themselves. Allow them to dry and burn them separately and you will have four little heaps of ash similar in aspect and practically identical in composition. Intelligences are those little heaps of ashes. Their personalities are their differences. To want to bring everything back to the intelligence, is like wanting to bring everything back to ashes. Two mathematicians talking mathematics understand each other very well; they are all intelligence. Two lovers talking love do not understand each other at all; they are all sensibility.

M. Delarue: But lovers who adore each other. . . .

M. Desmaisons: They adore each other, they mingle to-

gether, they laugh, weep or cry out together but they do not understand each other. Sensibilities are not made to understand each other but to feel each other. In the moments when they understand each other they are no longer lovers. As soon as they are lovers they penetrate each other, they no longer understand each other. Love also is one of the fine arts.

M. Delarue: You mean that art is made to be felt and not to be understood?

M. Desmaisons: So it seems to me. Every time people try to talk of art with their intelligence they say nothing but imbecilities. You see a parade of all the abstract words, all the commonplaces, everything which is too well-known, or too true, or of so banal and so vague a generality that the audience understands anything it chooses if it is complaisant, and nothing at all if it is restive. I am negative. I do not like phrases into which clumsy jugglers have pretended to put something: "Open the orange, and you will find your ring in it." I open it and there is nothing there at all. The trick has failed.

M. Delarue: You are severe.

M. Desmaisons: Yes, for general ideas. That old shop of old accessories. . . .

M. Delarue: Oh!

M. Desmaisons: I express myself badly. General ideas are neither playhouse accessories nor shop-window displays. I should rather compare them to museum attendants, to guides. They must be questioned as to the classification

of the museum, and the position of pictures, but they must be silenced as soon as they have given a strict and useful information. These guides will help you to find your way through the galleries of the Louvre, but take care not to question them about the value of the works of which they are the perpetual and narrow-minded spectators. On the contrary, listen religiously to your own sensibility!

M. Delarue: No doubt, but will not intelligence help me to enjoy my sensibility?

M. Desmaisons: And who says anything to the contrary? Do you think I despise the intelligence? With my intelligence itself? Nothing is more beautiful than the spectacle of a fine intelligence, an original intelligence, a living flower continually fed with sap. Intelligence is the flowering of the sensibility. A stunted sensibility flowers ill.

M. Delarue: This is beginning again to be not very clear to me. It tires me. All I want to understand is that for me art must be a source of pleasure and not a course of morality.

M. Desmaisons: Come now, have you ever seen one of these strikes end in any way except as a comedy? It will be the same again this time, you see! The only revolutions which happen are those which make themselves. What an idea to announce a battle three months beforehand when they have only uncertain forces at their disposition!

M. Delarue: Perhaps their naïveté will save us.

M. Desmaisons: And civilisation with us. For we repre-

sent civilisation, my friend. We are the sons and the continuers of a very old tradition. What would men gain by making us pave streets or clean drains, and what would the paviors talk about as they sat in our armchairs?

M. Delarue: Then you think the world is led by logic?

M. Desmaisons: What logic? Yours? Mine? I think nothing of the sort, but I believe there is such a thing as physics and that civilisation is part of it.

M. Delarue: That is obscure but optimistic. The labour of several centuries can easily be destroyed in a few days.

M. Desmaisons: They would have to destroy all the men who carry the tradition in their heads.

M. Delarue: That is perhaps difficult.

M. Desmaisons: But I suppose it is not that which prevents you from sleeping?

M. Delarue: Why not?

M. Desmaisons: You are not a child.

M. Delarue: Unfortunately.

M. Desmaisons: If there were a revolution how delighted the children would be!

M. Delarue: There is also talk of a strike of schoolmasters.

M. Desmaisons: Well now, there is the comic touch!

M. Delarue: There it is, I admit!

M. Desmaisons: The renaissance of Operetta! The strike of schoolmasters! So these poor fellows have ended up by believing in their social importance? I thought they only pretended to in order to obtain academic distinctions.

M. Delarue: Comic, comic? It is rather lamentable, we are submerged by stupidity. . . .

M. Desmaisons: Not yet submerged, but the flood is rising and it is a very dirty inundation. Oh! I shall not lose my head, I struggle against it. My boat is ready, with provisions and spare oars.

M. Delarue: It seems to me that in the past men were not so infatuated with themselves.

M. Desmaisons: They had religious infatuation. That cannot have been very gay either.

M. Delarue: It was terrible, and cruelly stupid.

M. Desmaisons: The present spectacle is less humiliating.

M. Delarue: Scarcely.

M. Desmaisons: Men who try to ameliorate their lives are more estimable than fanatics who dispute about the path to follow in order to go to heaven.

M. Delarue: Going to heaven was amusing. What a privilege!

M. Desmaisons: People still go there.

M. Delarue: It's quite out of date. Would it amuse you now?

M. Desmaisons: Me? Oh! Not a bit.

Is collectivism anything but a tendency towards a mad individualism? When we talk of individualism we are thinking chiefly of superiorities, originalities. We see no objection to men's trying to rise above each other. Indi-

vidualism as we understand it includes scarcely any limit of development. At a certain stage we only look upon it from an aesthetic point of view and the fortunate crime or the last robbery leaves us indulgent, although perhaps frightened. This way of treating the individualist idea is, in the vulgar sense, immoral, but it has a beauty to which the humblest Christian moralists are sometimes forced to yield. It is aristocratic individualism, creative not of castes or classes but of extremely mobile and instable groups. Democratic and collectivist individualism does not even conceive of the existence of superiorities, even the most evident. It calls them privileges and strives to bring them down. Its clearly Judeo-Christian origin can be seen in its fundamental notion of the absolute equality of men, a transposition of the theological equality of souls. Its dream is certainly liberty in security, a mediocre ideal which nevertheless may charm the very great majority of men. They no longer consider the quality of work or of a product, but the quantity. All men who have worked for eight hours have a right to the same wages. If some earned more, would it not be to the detriment of others? Such is the pure doctrine, but the most disciplined minds still retain a certain ancestral respect for superiority as the hardest hearts allow themselves to be touched by beauty, and the claims of the manual workers so far only extend to a minimum wage.

Let us take the word liberal, which is an old one. During

the Restoration it had a sense which except for certain slight historical differences, corresponds closely enough to what we mean to-day by the word radical. In the work of Stendhal, who was in the first rank of liberal minds, there is a whole theory of radical politics. In his day, liberal, like radical today, was connected with Jacobinism. It signified, and this is the pivot round which the word has turned, a certain liberty of the Left opposed to a certain liberty of the Right. Now, at a certain moment, the majority of the country ranged itself on the side of the liberty of the Left. Liberal, a word of the opposition, could no longer describe an idea of government. So the supporters of the liberty of the Right, took up the abandoned word and made it the expression of the party of the liberties of the Right. The liberal of the past was anti-clerical; the liberal of today is clerical. Liberal used to mean: liberty against the priests; to-day it means: liberty for the priests.

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The pleasures of vanity are almost incomprehensible for philosophers of our school. We place above everything, do we not? the natural pleasures, egotistic pleasures, all that is a real enjoyment in every order—physical, intellectual, sentimental. Others, perhaps the majority of men, esteem above everything the social pleasures, the pleasures which are seen, which excite envy. For such people to be happy is to appear happy.

To be applauded, to be praised, there are people whom that consoles for everything; and there are others, on the

contrary, who drag out a wretched existence beneath fame or beneath the ostentation of wealth. Perhaps the vain are more useful to society, if it is permissible to consider the social entity while neglecting individual realities. They do not give it its charm, but they give it its glitter, its movement. Vanity is a principle of action. But it would be very reasonable to divide men into two categories—the vain and those whom we should then call the voluptuous. All men participate in these two qualities, except a few monsters. But in every man one is dominant. It is very evident that those who run after a decoration are the vain, but the voluptuous receive it without any objections.

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M. Desmaisons: Come now, do you believe in the purity of virgins?

M. Delarue: Heu! I think it more decent to believe in it.

M. Desmaisons: When we go into society we shall pretend to do so, granted. I continue. Outside of marriage a man easily escapes the consequences of love. And, even in marriage he does not bear the cruellest burdens. On the other hand, every time a woman whose womb is empty accepts a man's embraces she does not know whether that fragile womb is not going to be filled. If at that moment there were not a perfect over-clouding of the understanding what girl would not repulse with terror the final caress which perhaps will leave the fatal poison in her flesh?

M. Delarue: You are becoming lyrical again. You love

women and when you speak of them there is an over-clouding of your intelligence too.

M. Desmaisons: Yes, I love women, I admit it, but this subject, instead of disturbing my mind, clarifies it rather, and I know very well what I am saying. I am not a feminist when women demand the right to vote, but how much of a feminist I should be if they demanded the right to produce an abortion, the right to dispose of their flesh as they please, the right to have a foetus extirpated as a polypus is extirpated! The embryo which swims in a woman's belly belongs to her as much as her own entrails; it is a part of her own body. Either she is a slave or we must grant her the free disposal of it.

M. Delarue: With certain reservations I would grant you that for the woman who is not married, but . . .

M. Desmaisons: Do not let us mix up civil questions with natural questions. Let us remain within physiology.

M. Delarue: But you will admit that a husband has certain rights over the product of copulation. Paternity . . .

M. Desmaisons: What is paternity? Do you suppose that the father of the child is the gentleman who acted as a channel in the mechanism of fertilisation? My friend, the father is the modest spermatozoön which came in first in the race to the ovum. Sometimes a syringe has performed the paternal office, and with success.

M. Delarue: Yes, I know. But still the spermatozoön is the product of a male and without this male the ovum would remain sterile.

M. Desmaisons: That is not quite certain. You are not ignorant of the fact that the ova of sea-urchins have been fertilized by a drop of acid. Perhaps sperm is only an excitant. To replace man in the labour of fertilizing woman it would be sufficient to find the excitement desired by the feminine ovum. However, that would be quite useless, for there is at present no lack of males of good will. Another thing. Do you know the theory according to which the genital cells are specialised and engender each other, so that we are the sons, not of our man ancestors, but of a series of cells, the most ancient of which was contemporary with the origin of life itself? We are not the producers of spermatozoa, we are only their carriers, their convoys.

M. Delarue: But the resemblance of sons to fathers? But paternal heredity?

M. Desmaisons: Heredity is only a theory. Everyone has every heredity. However, not being able to deny the resemblance, I see no reason for denying the whole of heredity, in which resemblance is the most certain phenomenon. There is something about it I do not understand and nobody has yet explained. Sometimes a child more resembles his uncle than his father; he is sometimes a striking portrait of a very distant ancestor, direct or indirect. These are very limited resemblances.

M. Delarue: But even if all this is granted, it does not solve the question of abortion.

M. Desmaisons: But it may help. We are to prove that every woman is the mistress of her flesh and that the

embryo she carries is a part of that flesh and owes scarcely anything to the male's flesh. But let us leave that. Let us admit provisionally the old traditional ideas about paternity. Let us admit that a father may love the flesh of his flesh in its product. This does not deprive the woman of any of her right, which is to consider the embryo which hangs in her entrails as part of herself. You want indisputable facts? Here is one—maternity. Have you ever seen a birth?

M. Delarue: No.

M. Desmaisons: You ought to see it. That ball of dirty hair which appears and soon cries before the rest of the parcel has come through the door, the fall of a squirming red thing; I believe in maternity.

M. Delarue: Good, but at what moment does it begin? Is it when the red parcel has entered our world?

M. Desmaisons: It begins earlier. It begins at the very moment when the foetus, whether expelled by force or inclination, is capable of living. Before that there is no maternity; there is a piece of flesh encysted in the womb. Maternity begins at the precise moment when there are two lives. As long as there is only one life, there is only a female, there is no mother.

M. Delarue: With a little boldness you might singularly extend this right of a woman over her child; absolute mistress of the child before its birth, why should she not be its absolute mistress after its birth?

M. Desmaisons: If you take away the word absolute,

which is no longer admissable when it is a question of the relations between one being and another being, I should accept the proposition. The child belongs to its mother; it is for her to take care of it, to bring it up, to educate it. It is a right as well as a duty. In social life such a duty should not be without certain privileges. For example, in the wage-earning classes the working mothers should be paid in proportion to the number of children they are bringing up. Moreover, I think a woman should not have to work outside the work of her home. We should have to find some system to assure them all a relative idleness and a certain amount of comfort. Then perhaps we might insist on their submission to the laws of fertilisation. Meanwhile, if abortion is a crime, which I do not admit, it is a crime entirely imputable to males and society. I wonder how men have come to consider so natural an act as a crime? It must be another of these Christian ideas?

M. Delarue: It is certain that the Greeks and Romans practised abortion; it was a branch of their medicine. Among the Mohammedans, and almost all Asiatics, abortion is a simple, legal and sometimes obligatory operation.

M. Desmaisons: The Christians forbade abortion, I think, for reasons of baptism. In the case of a dangerous childbirth, it is still their principle to sacrifice the mother to the child. There are odd treatises of sacred embryology where the priests are urged to arm themselves with a knife in cases of danger and to open the maternal womb in order to extract the future Christian. They even imagined

a syringe for baptising the foetus in the womb itself, so that if the woman died before the expulsion, the infant automatically goes off by itself to take its place among the number of the elect!

M. Delarue: Do you think the Jesuits were very severe to abortion?

M. Desmaisons: I do not think so. But let us look, I am curious to read the opinion of a Jesuit on this delicate subject. Where shall we find it? Ah! This is quite a rich collection. Here we are: homicide, murder of a priest, infanticide, abortion . . .

"Concerning abortion. Can a woman procure herself an abortion? I reply: 1. That if the fruit is not animated and if pregnacy is dangerous to her, she may do so, either directly or indirectly . . . 2. If the fruit is already animated and she would die with the child, she may before delivery take such remedies as indirectly harm the child and directly aid her . . ."

M. Delarue: But all that is medicine.

M. Desmaisons: Wait.

"3. If a chaste girl has been corrupted, despite herself, by an adulterous young man, she may, before her fruit is animated, get rid of it as she chooses, for fear of losing her honour which is far more precious to her than life itself."

This time it is actually the right to abortion.

M. Delarue: I yield to the reasons of the good father. . . .

M. Desmaisons: Father Airault, a victim of Pascal.

M. Delarue: After all, they had a certain intrepidity of mind.

M. Desmaisons: They were Christians to such a slight extent! When will people begin to understand that clericalism is the enemy only because it is one of the masks of Christianity? M. de Mun wrote the other day that present events show "the struggle of Christianity and universal paganism." Alas! M. de Mun is deceived. The boldest of our political men would not dare to sign that obscure Jesuit's proposition—that a girl who has been seduced has the right to procure an abortion. Yet it is a pagan proposition and strictly anti-Christian. But the centuries crush us down. . . . Come, my friend, let us be among those who hold firm. Let us have the shoulders of Atlas.

M. Delarue: Try. I find it more agreeable to lie under the warm eiderdown of prejudices.

M. Desmaisons: Coward!

Let me give you a piece of advice; do not read Lucian. The man terrified me the other day. As his book fell from my hands I saw in imaginary space the centuries and the centuries of Christian literature fall away. After eighteen hundred years the men who participate in the intelligence are exactly at the same point where Lucian was. It is a little terrifying but also very curious. We have uselessly marked time since the second century in the darkness of Christianity and when at last we perceive a little light, that light is exactly the light in which that antique irony smiles.

M. Desmaisons: Let us scoff, my friend, we shall never scoff too much, we shall never be too Voltairean, and that is exactly what the Romantics lack. Between the Romantic spirit and the classical spirit there is the same difference as between Catholicism and Protestantism, that almost ingenuous form of Christianity. Between the two categories there is the difference between the continuous and the discontinuous. The classic or traditional Latin considers life as a series of alternating states, indifferent, happy, sad, comic, tragic or passionate. These states are balanced in him, efface one another, neutralize one another. He is always ready to pass from laughter to tears, from daydreaming to meditation, from pleasure to business, from passion to gallantry. Everything balances in this fortunate nature, which is apt for all sensations and sentiments except one, *boredom.* "Boredom came to life one day from uniformity." Notice the prodigious variety of Voltaire's work, which ranges from geometry to bawdry—he is a type of the Latin, the refined Latin, the Gallo-Roman. Fénelon, with his serious fund of mystic piety, amuses himself with Greek voluptuousness, humanitarian dreams, grammar, philosophy, politics—a less representative but still quite curious type. The Romantic is the man who cannot vary either his sentiments or his ideas. He struggles always in the same direction, exhausts himself, becomes exasperated, bored, and falls into the pit of despair he has digged himself. He is the man with fixed ideas. The true Christian must think perpetually of his eternal salvation.

His individualism is frantic. A single being exists in the world, himself; and a single thought must occupy this unique being, the future life. There is something of the maniac in the fervent Christian; there is something of the maniac in the Romantic. Like the Christian, the Romantic thinks only of himself and his eternal salvation, but he places eternity in his own lifetime and transposes duration into intensity. He tries to condense centuries into minutes and wears himself out in the part of a blind Danaid. He pours floods of wine into a thimble, drinks, and is amazed to find he has scarcely moistened his tongue. What a type of the Romantic is Chateaubriand's René, who might have found so much amusement in life and yet was so much bored by it! When a man tries to live of himself, on himself and for himself, he is always bored. There is no pleasure except in others; all pleasure is social. See the lamentable Senancour. Does he not make you think of the legendary Trappist digging a little of his grave every day! What a morning prayer to colour the hours of the day!

M. Delarue: You make me understand Senancour, but Jean Jacques?

M. Desmaisons: Ah! I admit that in spite of Lasserre, Jules Lamaitre, many others, Maurras, Jacques Bainville whose logic is very eloquent, I do not find it easy to link up Romanticism with Jean Jacques Rousseau, any more than to link up Hugo with Senancour. There are two or three quite distinct Romanticisms each with a different source. I see no link between the religious Romanticism

of Rousseau and the grammatical Romanticism of Victor Hugo. Poet and grammarian go together; it was the state of Dante, of Ronsard, of Corneille, of Goethe. Victor Hugo: "I have set the red cap on the old dictionary". That is his glory, and that was his role. No sensibility, no ideas except antithetical ones, a man orchestra; the flute replies to the horn and the horn to the flute. Between him and Rousseau there is nothing in common. Hugo comes from the middle ages through Paulin Paris, Roquefort, the Abbé Leboeuf, Lacurne de Sainte-Palaye and Delalain's collection. Victor Hugo is the synthesis of French poetry; he thought he was admiring Shakespeare and he was imitating du Bartas.

M. Delarue: Indeed, it is hard to see what *La Légende des Siècles* owes to *La Nouvelle Héloïse.*

M. Desmaisons: And do you think Lamartine was the pupil of Jean Jacques to any greater extent than that Jean Jacques was in the air of the time and within the reach of every respiration? Lamartine educated himself in Le Tourneur's translations, in Young's *Night Thoughts,* Hervey's *Meditations among Tombs,* in Ossian, and in Byron.

M. Delarue: Byron? There is nothing about him in M. Lasserre's works.

M. Desmaisons: French Romanticism without Byron? Lamartine without Byron? Musset without Byron? George Sand without Byron? As well write the history of Lutheranism without mentioning Luther. French Romanticism is not Rousseau, who was already far out of

date, but Byron; it is *Manfred, Lara, the Corsair, Don Juan.* Without Byron Musset would not have gone beyond the *Ballade à la Lune.* And George Sand? What is *Lélia?* The *Manfred* of the milch cow.

M. Delarue: Oh! Oh! I am greatly amused.

M. Desmaisons: And is not Vigny Byronian? His aristocratic bitterness is that of the *Giaour,* of *Conrad,* of *Lara.* Byron is the soul of our poetic Romanticism. Rousseau only appears among the prose-writers, Sand, Michelet, Quinet. Already we have three Romanticisms—grammatical Romanticism, Hugo; poetic Romanticism, Byron; sentimental and political Romanticism, Rousseau. There is a fourth of German origin, picturesque Romanticism, Nodier, Gérard Nerval. But there are others, that of Stendhal who is Voltairean and sensual, and that of Balzac, which comes from Maturin, Lewis and the assize-court. French Romanticism, but already that represents five or six literatures interlinked with each other, five or six streams among which Jean Jacques Rousseau is certainly not a Rhone nor a Danube.

M. Delarue: Then you do not believe in his influence?

M. Desmaisons: His influence! It was enormous, but in a limited domain, that of social politics, which might also be termed sentimental politics. Rousseau is the father of deliquescent sociology, as it appears in the work of George Sand and, even in our own days, in our poor dramaturgy. But where did he find those ideas about equality, about happiness conditioned by simplicity of life

and poverty of mind, where but in Christianity? Who but the preachers declaimed through fifteen hundred years before Rousseau against luxury, the vices of civilisation, intellectual corruption? The ramblings of Jean Jacques about the state of nature are stupid, but no more so than those of Fénelon. His diatribes against civilisation are mad, but no more so than those of Saint Bernard. And who gave the example not only of cursing society but of flying from it, who but the monks? Rousseau is healthy compared with a Bruno or a Rancé. What is the anarchy of Rousseau if we compare it with that of a Francis of Assisi? It will be said that in spite of all this, Catholicism has been a school of discipline. I agree, but in spite of the Rousseau virus the Revolution and the nineteenth century were schools of energy. A man of action is necessarily rebellious to Rousseau and it is the men of action who govern, whether they are mediocre or superior. Rousseau's ideas are the ideas of a Christian working man; they will lead the world when M. Marc Sangnier is dictator.

M. Delarue: M. Lasserre puts it differently but says nearly the same thing.

M. Desmaisons: Parts of his book are very true, and the political chapters are among the best, although I do not believe that the eternal revolution dates from Rousseau. If it is eternal its only beginning was the beginning of humanity and it will only end with the human species. The spirit of revolt would have been nothing without Christianity which provided it with a doctrine. Rousseau renewed

the doctrine by rising up a Christian at a time when the world was no longer so. Hence the astonishment of the world, and its docility like that of a horse suddenly blinded. But it is not certain that the future does not belong to the scientific mind.

M. Delarue: Then what remains of Rousseau?

M. Desmaisons: The category of passion. We shall not easily be made to believe that he invented passion. He did not write the *Letters of a Portuguese Nun,* I think; but he gave passion a method and new speech, which is a great deal. He rewarmed hearts which were freezing; he made gallantry ridiculous; he freed love from discredit and renewed its nobility. To oppose *La Nouvelle Héloïse* to Crébillon's *Sopha* was to make in the domain of sentiment the revolution which Descartes made in the intellectual world. There were philosophers before Descartes; there were passionate men before Jean Jacques; but they both created methods and nothing is fertile but methods. Descartes is out of date; Rousseau is out of date; agreed, but their methods are immortal. Whoever thinks depends on Descartes and his sceptical examination; whoever loves depends on Rousseau and his fever of optimism. It does not follow that everyone is called to thought or everyone to passion; but the Cartesian principle is not harmed by *Bouvard and Pécuchet* nor the Héloïsean principle by *Madame Bovary.* Is life too fair and too rich that we must lop off from it all originalities, among which passion and the fury for knowledge are not the least?

M. Delarue: Ah! I begin to breathe again. I shall be able to re-read the *Confessions*, then.

M. Desmaisons: No, do not re-read the *Confessions*. It is useless. We all know them by heart, even when we have not read them. They have passed into the air; they have passed into our blood; the *Confessions* are the book which taught men not to blush at their passions or even at their vices. It was written by a Christian and is the most truly pagan book which has been seen since the *Golden Ass*. The *Confessions* killed shame.

M. Delarue: That is precisely what people blame them for.

M. Desmaisons: Yes, when they are Christians. But those who are not Christians forgive Rousseau all his Christianity because of that book.

Security of person, individual property, liberty of morals: Outside the circle founded by these three points there is anarchy or despotism, which are the same thing.

There are no good or bad morals, any more than there are useful or harmful birds or insects.

If we may order all men to be brave, may we not order all women to be chaste?

The heretics are always much more stupid than the traditionalists.

Have you noticed how the world is clearly divided into two parts nowadays? On one side is the spirit of science which doubts and seeks; on the other side, the spirit of ignorance which believes and asserts.

I think one of the first duties of a critic is to respect even the bad book which he is incapable of writing himself.

No, my friend, I am not one of those gloomy persons who want a Minister of Agriculture to be able to distinguish between a turnip and a radish.

The boarding-school, the barracks, the hospital are the three horrors, the three negations of civilsation.

If men had a little intelligence they would be ungovernable, and if they were very intelligent they would not need to be governed.

I am coming to think that our eighteenth century said everything which the Germans of the nineteenth chewed over with so many metaphysical grimaces.

What! Are not politics the comic page in newspapers?

One must become bitter or go mad.

Through living among books, among printed matter, we have come to give literature an importance it does not possess.

It is possible that the collectivists may realize the Christian dream; a dull, honest life under an unbreakable law, a horrible fraternity, an eternal promiscuity.

Platonic love is inhuman and perhaps pathological. Libertinage is much less dangerous.

To doubt the intelligence of a famous scientist is to make an act of liberation, absolutely like doubting the sincerity of a priest or a politician.

Politics, my dear friend, are like piano-playing and prostitution; you must begin at a very early age or you get nowhere.

Men are so silly that when they give a new name to an old thing they think they have conceived a new thing.

We cannot reflect and act at the same time. We cannot create and criticise at the same time. They acted, they did not reflect. If they had reflected, they would have done nothing.

Only the weak should be persecuted, only those who are already conquered.

They never try to suppress one religion except to impose another. But what is comical, is that it is always the same.

The strong and active part of a nation is always incredulous of the religion of the weak and idle part.

Nothing makes me laugh like the belief in the perpetuity of religions, political or social forms. The present social state is not humanity's last word, but if collectivism should ever reign I do not think it would be the last word either. The grandsons of those who abolish private property will rediscover it one day and will propose it to a marvelling humanity as the panacea.

Society is based on inequality and the laws on equality. In other words, you can only make a law by supposing all men equal; but men are unequal, and unequal in almost everything.

I am not insensible to honest feelings, but I think that family Sundays will lose much of their charm when they become obligatory.

Logic is good in reasoning; it is bad in life. Life is the unforeseen.

Lying is not within the grasp of everyone.

The devil! I cannot despise the whole history of France. No one will make me say that Richelieu was a cretin, Vincent de Paul a wretch and Bossuet an ass.

Men have always wanted to be happy. They could not want anything else. But what has changed is the successive ideas they have formed of happiness.

I like a mind which is diverse, and it is that which makes

me admire Voltaire, whose greatness I understand at last.

It is a great consolation not to believe in God, and the book which sustains that conviction is a great book.

What is good, what is moral, is what pleases us, what suits our present sensibility. The only restriction to make is that our pleasure must not be anti-social. . . Is pornography anti-social?

The one objection to phallic sculpture is that a phallus is not very beautiful.

What is immoral, is stupidity.

If we thought we knew the last word about everything, life would lose much of its savour.

The world is full of mysteries, and financial mysteries are the most obscure.

PHILOSOPHICAL EXCURSIONS SECOND SERIES

[PROMENADES PHILOSOPHIQUES: 2EME SERIE]

1908

HUMANITY to-day, especially in the most civilised races, seems only to be sustained by artifices. Already excitants are necessary to it, and at the same time these necessary excitants are dangerous to it. On the other hand, intelligence cultivated to excess transforms real life into a life of show. Civilised man no longer lives his life, he lives a factitious life, a learned life, subject far less to things than to the idea he forms of things. In a certain sense the very civilised man is outside nature and only comes unwillingly in contact with it; at other times his imagination increases twice or ten times the appearance

of his strength and his use of needs immensely exceeds necessity. Hence two causes of progressive weakness—the nonusage or the immoderate usage of the physical instruments of physical life. But, victim of the artificial means by which he has prolonged the existence of his species, man may tell himself that he has created a world among the worlds and a supernatural species among the hundred thousand natural species which live or have lived on the earth.

When we compare the past with the present we always forget to consider how much the present is indebted to the past. When we are born, or a few years later, we find ourselves masters of an immense and complicated mechanism which appears to us, or very nearly so, to be a part of nature. From this point of view towns are bad schools of philosophy. When you have lived in the country where almost everything is lacking, you form a better idea of the past. You appreciate better the solidity of the foundations laid by previous generations. The thousand little conveniences, the little modern luxuries hide from us what is essential in civilisation. To be deprived of them is often a means of realising their uselessness; but there is a very ancient and stable portion of which man could not be deprived without ceasing to be man. Now, if we reflect, we shall see that this ancient portion is not only the most useful, but also the most beautiful. Without printing, Celto-Germanic civilisation is possible; without writing, no intellectual civilisation can be conceived. Writing, therefore,

is much more important than printing, and the human moment which saw it born is therefore a greater and more beautiful moment. The unknown persons (it was not Gutenberg) who discovered printing in the fifteenth century, demonstrated the constancy of human genius and nothing more. There is neither weakening nor progress. After thirty centuries the constancy is perfect, so much so that we might believe that the same man, after a long sleep, had returned to add to his instrument two or three little bolts, which give it all its value.

* * *

It is very evident that from the day when man acquired the certainty that the present life is the only one on which he can count, it was no longer possible for him to give this very brief life any other end than happiness. But the word "end" is a very bad one, since it assumes that life is a race towards a mark which we must strain hard to reach. That is not what Epicurus meant. His advice looked to the present moment, the most immediate future. He does not say to us ironically: be unhappy now in order to be happy later on. He says to us: adapt yourself to the life of each day, in order to draw from it all the pleasures it contains. To that end make use of all the senses Nature has given you. Neglect none of them. Learn to enjoy the light and the different, always changing, aspects it gives to the objects it surrounds. Learn to listen to the harmonies of Nature. Learn to taste the pleasantness of the food which sustains you. When you yield to love, learn to utilise

those divine minutes for the greatest possible joy of your sensibility. In a word, learn to live in the present, learn to taste the savour of life. Is this advice good for everyone, for the humble as well as for the powerful, for the poor as well as for the rich? Yes, certainly, for if everyone followed them, life would be simpler, gentler, more human. The rich Epicurean, determined to be completely happy, would not consent to exploit the necessities of other men in order to get even richer. If he did, he would have failed to understand anything of the principles of this beautiful and wise philosophy.

Evolution is not progress. Evolution is a fact and progress is a sentiment.

We must throw off all superstitions, but it is good to retain certain respects, that for grandeur and that for beauty.

I like people who like Epicurus. I consider it a proof of boldness and nobility of mind to like that great philosopher.

LITERARY EXCURSIONS
THIRD SERIES

[PROMENADES LITTERAIRES: 3EME SERIE]

1909

MET Huysmans towards the end of the year 1889. Having written *Stratagèmes,* a story I thought likely to charm the author of *A Rebours* and which I wished to dedicate to him, I marched bravely to the Ministry of the Interior without any introduction. After a great many courtyards, stairways and corridors, I was shown a door. I only remember one thing about this first interview, which is that the welcome was cordial. Without paying much attention to the manuscript I handed to him, Huysmans granted my request and then, rolling a cigarette, observed me with his cat's eyes and enlarged bitterly on the saplessness of contemporary

literature. I think I had been sent by Villiers de l'Isle Adam. I murmured the name, which no doubt had something to do with Huysmans's affability. It made a bridge between use, gave us a subject of conversation, determined the quality of the literary atmosphere. Huysmans had a profound admiration and a great affection for Villiers. I stayed a long time. He detained me standing near the door. When he was tired of writing, he told me, the boredom of his dreary office overwhelmed him. He asked me to come again. It was the begining of an acquaintance which was to last two or three years.

I left the Bibliothèque Nationale at four. Huysmans did not leave his office till five. So I went for him and nearly every day went back with him towards the Faubourg Saint Germain, where we both lived.

By way of the Champs-Elysées and the quays on the left bank we made our way to the Café Caron, at the corner of the Rue de l'Université and the Rue des Saints-Pères. It was very regular. Huysmans, who was deputy head-clerk in his department, made no pretence of zeal. He was entrusted with the business connected with gambling, clubs and casinos, and as soon as his official work was done, he took his hat with the joy of a dog let off its chain. Yet in that detested office he wrote nearly all his books. Among others, the manuscript of *Là-Bas* remained there permanently. Having lunched very early in the Rue de Grenelle, at the restaurant de la Petite-Chaise where they looked after him well, he arrived at his ministry about eleven

o'clock, dealt with current business, and then sat down to write on the magnificent State paper the history of the Maréchal de Retz and that of Durtal. He erased very little. The strange image, the brutal metaphor came spontaneously to his pen. Moreover, his spoken style entirely resembled his written style, a proof that his tortured manner was the natural reflection of his uneasy character, curious of what is rare, unpublished, impossible. Without any trouble he took up the phrase interrupted by the entrance of the messenger boy with a portfolio. He wrote slowly, little at a time, but regularly. The documentation of his books which at first looks marvellous, was in reality very rudimentary. In that sort of work his art was that of a superior cook, an able alchemist, who can make the most refined broths, the sharpest sauces from common herbs and ordinary meats. All that portion of *A Rebours* dealing with the Latin poetry of the decadence is condensed from the vast work of Ebert, who quotes scarcely any texts. Des Esseintes pinned his ingenious epithets on the analyses of that heavy and learned professor. Huysmans summarises with a picturesque phrase often a whole page or chapter of the conscientious German, and if classic truth is in the *History of Literature in the West,* impressionistic truth is in *A Rebours.* Huysmans was greatly astonished by my work on the Latin poets of the middle ages, though the idea of it came from des Esseintes. It gave him a taste for that game-flavoured language which he scarcely knew except at second-hand; his strange preface to the *Latin Mys-*

tique shows that his philological knowledge was very restricted. He did without it quite well. That *A Rebours,* which I then admired perhaps excessively, has remained for me one of the most curious books of our time, in its way a continuation of *Bouvard et Pécuchet. Là-Bas* is already less interesting; *En Route* only contains fine pages and, from *La Cathédrale* onwards, the stream is very muddy. At the moment of which I am speaking, how far we were from foreseeing such an end! I must confess, even if my perspicacity appears greatly diminished, that up to the last moment I had no idea of Huysmans's possible conversion. I thought that, for him as for me, Catholic decorations were only decorations. Seeing in them nothing but an art method, a means of Romanticism, a weapon against Naturaliste ugliness, I was very far from supposing that Huysmans sought for dogmatic realities behind the purple veil—our conversations were so little edifying, so far from all religiosity! . . .

Huysmans revealed to me some of his tastes, some of his ideas. Although he was very much bored in life, I always found him in the best humour at such moments. For an attentive companion his speech, incredibly racy, but never exalted, never violent, equally precise and coloured, was unrolled with confidence. Certain of his listener, he poured out drop by drop his contempts, his rancours, his hatreds, his disgusts, rending at once the Church and literature, the young men and his contemporaries, painting, criticism and the newspapers. A collection of his conversa-

tions would be a most curious satirical picture of Paris about 1890. Unfortunately, I rarely noted them, and I retain impressions rather than anything precise. Moreover, the few pages of a journal of that epoch which I possess could not be transcribed. Huysmans's speech was extremely coarse. To translate his sexual preoccupations and experiences he invented the most extravagant and filthy metaphors. His books are very chaste compared with his conversation. As to his literary judgments, their malevolence was really excessive, and perhaps not wholly free from a certain rancour. It is certain that at that time he could not forgive the success of Bourget and Maupassant, who had been his companions. . .

Everything has been said on the resemblance between Huysmans and one of the most curious of his characters, M. Folantin. At the time I knew him, Huysmans was beginning to become the Folantin of the Church. He liked to enumerate the frauds in the materials of the sacraments, to go over the blemishes which stained the beauty and sincerity of religious ceremonies. This excited him to a few blasphemies; he pointed out gravely that since the bread and wine of the sacrifice were adulterated, God absolutely refused henceforth to descend upon the altars, disgusted with raisin wine and potato-starch communion wafers. Was he then a believer? I do not think so; any more than he has ever been a free thinker. Brought up with a Christian education, he had always retained a secret taste for religion. When his powers declined, when the pleasures

of life were measured to him, he quite naturally turned towards the beliefs which promised him joys in compensation for those which were taken away from him.

Without knowing it, I had a share in Huysmans's conversion, by introducing him to Mme. de C. *(ourrière)*, who at that time had some familiarities with the church. She provided him with opportunities to witness rare and touching religious ceremonies, such as the taking of the veil in the Carmelite Convent of the Avenue de Saxe. We heard a very distressing sermon by Cardinal Richard, but while he spattered that mediocre purple with sarcasms, Huysmans was touched. Mme. de C. *(ourrière)* took us to Benediction one evening at the same Carmelite Convent; their lugubrious chanting spread through one's mind a sort of sacred fear which disturbed Huysmans. I made use for *Le Fantome* of the same impressions of a too romantic and very unhealthy poetry. Huysmans thought the same perhaps, since his preference went to the joyous plain-song of the Benedictines of the Rue Monsieur. It has already been half revealed that Mme. de C. *(ourrière)* put him in the hands of the Abbé Mugnier. Before he reached that point, Huysmans, while he was writing *Là-Bas,* was not without making some attempt to incline to Satanism. He lacked a Mme. Chantelouve and, as he had scarcely any imagination, he would have liked to work from real life. Mme. de C. *(ourrière's)* share in *Là-Bas* chiefly consisted in approaching certain occultists and, this is important, in confidences concerning a very bad priest she had known. Canon

Docre in *Là-Bas* is Canon — of Bruges, but the black Mass is purely imaginary. I looked up the details of that fantastic ceremony. I did not find any, because there are none. Finally Huysmans arranged his black Mass from the famous scene of the conspiracy against La Vallière, for which Montespan lent her body to the obscene contortions of an infamous sorcerer. The Abbé Boulant and the Abbé Roca also furnished some features for certain modern characters in *Là-Bas,* but the whole is a romantic invention. It must be plainly asserted, for simple souls have been deceived by it and have shuddered at sacrilegious scenes which were purely imaginary. I saw Huysmans every day while he was writing *Là-Bas* and he read or repeated to me many of its pages and episodes. When the book appeared, his conversion had already begun, but if he desired it, he scarcely hoped for it, and perhaps dreaded it.

The marvellous soup shared by Durtal in the sacristan's lodging in one of the towers of Saint-Sulpice was served to Huysmans at Mme. de C. *(ourrière's)* flat. It is a very small detail, but the ceremony of the soup preceded a far more important ceremony which had a strong effect on Huysmans's ideas. After the dinner, at which I was present, Edouard Dubus arrived, as had been arranged, and we occupied ourselves in making a small table turn, which lent itself very well. Dubus, an agreeable poet, a distinguished mind, was a half ironical occultist. I never knew whether he believed in his practices, or not. In any case he acquitted himself very well. When questioned the table made almost

sensible answers. At one time it was asked: Who are you? and it replied: I am Camille de Sainte-Croix. This was no longer the evocation of the dead, for Sainte-Croix, who then wrote piquant criticism and curious novels, is still alive. He lent himself to the most varied questions and, when he was pressed on the subject of his literary tastes, he admitted that Huysmans was his great admiration. From that moment on Huysmans became more attentive. Illustrious dead persons were called. There were edifying replies on the position of disembodied beings wandering in space. Everyone was serious; I was amused; Huysmans reflected and kept insatiably evoking. Finally the table eluded us, begun to turn almost by itself about the room to the rhythm of a jig. Dubus guided it lightly with one finger among the chairs. If there were any trickery at that moment I did not see how it was carried out. Dubus was capable of anything.

The next day I found Huysmans still disturbed. He demonstrated to me with unaccustomed gravity that, since the table was moved by spirits, the existence of the spirits proved at the same time both the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. I was too surprised to attempt any objection. There can be no doubt, this table-turning seance played a part in Huysmans's conversion. He talked of it to me for a long time. He had seen God in the dancing table as Moses saw him in the burning bush. When we ask for proofs of the supernatural we always receive them.

Shortly after this evening Huysmans disappeared and I never saw him again. Afterwards I learned that he had been to a retreat at the Trappe. I only know the rest of his life from what I have been told. It does not concern me. Here end my memories of him. I shall add, however, that Huysmans ceased to meet me on his return from the Trappe because he was so advised by certain persons, who feared for him the influence of my obvious scepticism.

Science and action follow a parallel evolution. Are there moments when the lines curve in and cross or touch each other? One might easily think so, but it is not certain. Modern society seems born of the Revolution; but what would have happened to the ideas of the Revolution without railways and factories? Does democracy come from the declaration of the rights of man or from the cheap manufacture of semi-luxuries? The influence of ideas on the physical order of things is perhaps only an illusion. We live one life and we think another; but we are always inclined to suppose that the life we think blends with the life we live. To think oneself happy and to be happy is the same thing. Life is only a representation and its living reality eludes us. The most unfortunate people on earth may be content, and happy nations, overlooking their felicity, may hurl themselves into a revolution. Probably the relative conditions of men have never greatly changed. Straw, which is the carpet for oxen in their stable, was the litter of kings in their rooms at the Louvre.

Public lighting dates from yesterday; private lighting dates from the day before yesterday; dazzling lives were displayed under that same subjection to the sun which regulates the activity of wild animals. All is relative, that is what we must never lose sight of. Rivarol pitied the nations who were ignorant of the horse and sail, and we laugh at the civilisations which did not know steam; later on they will make fun of us who still only go at seventy-five miles an hour. But what relation has this to personal happinesses, the sum of which makes up social happiness? In the end politics may be reduced to happiness. Every political theory is a theory of happiness. Hence the diversity of opinions, parallel to the diversity of tastes.

There is something incredible in the philosophic daring of Cyrano de Bergerac. His ideas in the year 1650 are exactly on a level with the freest which can be professed in our days. They may be summarized in a few phrases: He does not believe in God, in the immortality of the soul, or in conventional morality. The unpublished pages of *The Voyage to the Moon,* which I discovered in the Bibliothèque Nationale, leave no doubt in this respect. In that age his mind was perhaps the most completely freed from Christian teaching. Voltaire has not ridiculed more wittily the gross dogmas of the Bible about the earthly paradise, the serpent and the apple. He takes these stories, about which the poor in spirit are still disputing, for what they are, curious tales which become monstrous stupidity

if anyone pretends to make eternal truths of them. His interpretation of the myth of the serpent whose head the woman can cause to rise or to fall at her choice is certainly a little risky, but still of the right Gallic quality. The editor of *The Voyage to the Moon,* the good Canon Lebret, although a faithful friend of Cyrano's, naturally suppressed such passages. . .

On miracles, particularly miraculous cures, Cyrano de Bergerac clearly puts forward the quite modern theory of auto-suggestion. And he adds this remark: if the sick person asks heaven to cure him and is cured, the priests will say he has received the reward of his faith; if he is not cured, they will say he did not pray with sufficient fervour. His way of treating the question of God is even more disrespectful. If God exists, he says, let him show himself, let him make himself recognised, at least let him prove himself in an indisputable manner. Who is this God who shows himself to some and not to others, to the scoundrels of one religion and not to the honest man of another? Who then is this God who "plays hide-and-seek with men, says like children, 'Cuckoo, there he is'?" He has these things said to him by an inhabitant of the Moon and, in order not to end up like Vanini, takes care to accuse him of uttering "impertinent arguments", but the thrust is made and he immediately devises an interruption which relieves him from refuting an adversary who thinks exactly as he does himself. We who enjoy,—and yet it has not been for very long—full liberty of speaking and writing

are sometimes surprised at the precautions taken in the past by freethinkers in expressing themselves. Voltaire still made use of them. He contrasts the for and the against; the reader's good sense is left to decide. Cyrano was one of the old authors who spoke most freely; the original manuscript of *The Voyage to the Moon* is perhaps, under its amusing form, the boldest philosophical treatise ever published until recent years.

If Antony were not by definition a holy man and a naïve disbeliever, into what extravagantly deep scepticism should we not see him fall! Flaubert, at the end of his last page, is obliged to prostrate him at the foot of the Cross, but when we have made the same journey through human possibilities, what would be our attitude? I think it would be that of a melancholy and slightly disdainful smile. To have seen everything, felt everything, even in a dream, and understood everything, can scarcely predispose to joy. The modern Antony, and this would at least be a curious version of the character, would have begun by yielding to the temptations, for our state of mind is such that it is scarcely possible for us to resist our desires. We know, and this St. Antony did not know, that one life belongs to us, this life, the present life, and that the first of our solicitudes should be to draw from it all the satisfactions it may contain, within the limits of the great social necessities. This modern Antony then would be a sort of Faust, but less solemn, not in the least metaphysical, very little tempted

by philosophies, whose void he would have plumbed, turned chiefly towards scientific curiosity, and also towards the thousand sumptuous pleasures of life, towards ambition, towards intellectual domination.

He would have been spared nothing of all the enjoyments of sensuality, vanity and the intelligence. He would have fallen into all the snares avoided by the worthy Antony, and he would necessarily bring back an infinite lassitude from his vast journey. The smile of his eyes would be to tell men that he has penetrated all mysteries and that their curiosities seem very puerile to him. His melancholy would be the sign of the regret he retains in spite of all the fairy tales of which he was the hero. As to his disdain, it would be the sign of the slightness of interest which the life of ordinary men could offer him. But perhaps he must be assigned another sentiment on his return from the gorgeous exploration in the land of human enjoyments. Perhaps it would be correct to give him, as to St. Antony, a certain joy at having returned, at having escaped too many pleasures, at having re-discovered also the simplicity of his first life. Finally, the difference between the two heroes would not be so great as I first thought, for to have dreamed everything is perhaps equivalent to having experienced everything. Who does not remember very agreeable or even very happy moments, all the details of which have nevertheless escaped his memory? There remains in us, not the memory of a fact, but the memory of a state, the memory, not of a sensation but of a sentiment, and it

grows misty in life's distances. Yet if I were to write the story of this Antony I should not like him to leave in the mind so pessimistic an impression as Flaubert's Antony. I should like him to give off, at the same time as an admiration for tumultuous illusions, a tenderness for life itself in its most ordinary conditions. There is perhaps a new sentiment to be created, that of love of life for life's sake, apart from the great joys which life does not give to all and perhaps, if one thinks it over, does not give to anyone. This sentiment is almost absent from Flaubert's works. The characters all live in illusion or in the future. The present exists very little for them, because it is always inferior to their desires and to their imaginations. This is not the way in which life should be taken. On the contrary, we must know how to live in the present, in the passing moment. The future must not be feared, but we must not have an excessive confidence in it, for its very existence is uncertain. It is Christianity which, with its mania for the future life, has taught us to put off everything until the morrow, and especially, the happiness of living. No practice is more disastrous. Let us not imitate the good St. Antony who lived for forty years on bread and water with the object of gaining paradise at the end of his days. Our paradise is the passing day, the flying minute, the moment which already is no more. That is the lesson of St. Antony.

The Catholics and various Protestants, enemies on

many points, are perfectly agreed on this: that Christian morality must reign in the United States. Hence the crusade against immoral France, preached by nearly all the popular newspapers from New York to San Francisco. The tonsured clergy and the clergy with all their hair, the bearded clergy and the clean-shaven clergy, the clergy in cassocks and the clergy in tail-coats, in short all the ecclesiastics of this country, which is full of them, are united in declaring war against French books. It is a rage, it is a madness, it is, as I said, a crusade.

However, a pretext is necessary for this war. It is found in the "pornographic" book. This book, almost unknown in France, as M. Jules Claretie recently observed, is generally manufactured in Paris by German industrialists whose centre of operations is Leipsic, Hamburg or Berlin. It can be recognised by its clumsily illustrated cover whose design, where the German hand shows itself, is supposed to represent a little Parisian girl on a spree. Within the covers provocative vignettes swim through a text without genius; there are couples kissing, women putting on their stockings or changing their chemises, wind effects which blow up petticoats, sea bathing scenes, chests and cruppers swelling out bathing suits striped like a zebra. This humble German lust is what the Americans call "French pornography". But since it is written in a sort of French, since it bears the name of a bookseller installed in Paris (with a name ending in *ach,* or *adt,* or *rtsch*) let us provisionally accept responsibility for it. After all, it

will not be very heavy.

What indeed is proved by the diffusion of these books in America? That France is corrupt? That it has no longer any moral sense, any aesthetic sense? Not at all. It proves that the Americans are fervent amateurs of pornography, that is all. They ask for it, and it is given to them. It is the most classic political economy. If Chicago manufactures salt pork it is because there is a demand for salt pork in the world. If Paris manufactures pornography, it is because there is an international market for pornography, since the home market is very limited. If they asked for Pauls and Virginias, the same authors would manufacture the sentimental novel illustrated with touching pictures. The pretext therefore is a very bad one. If the Americans disapprove of this sort of book, let them close their doors to it. If they like serious books, let them tell us so; we have no lack of them, we will send them whole fleets full. But probably our serious books are what they fear most. What frightens them is the liberty of our minds, the boldness of our philosophy, our frankly negative religious criticism, our determination to rank among the futile things that theological disputing which makes up the bulk of their literature with a few travel books and a few harmless novels.

But there is another America besides that which slanders France; there is the America which loves French thought, studies it and knows how to glorify it in noble pages. In the United States there is an intellectual aristocracy for whom French literature is an inexhaustible

force. Above the newspapers which propagate ignorance and hatred from French books, there are those who lose no opportunity of making us better known. . .

There is no reason then for us to be greatly disturbed. The Americans who like pornography will continue to supply themselves with it from the manufacturers who make it best, under the best commercial conditions. And those who like fine books of art or thought will also continue to seek our poets, our philosophers, our scientists, and to ask of them noble emotions or pretexts for salutary meditations. To talk of the moral decadence of France, to pretend that its writers are merely pornographic, is stupid. It is so stupid that one wonders whether a nation which can be made to believe such imbecilities is really a civilised nation, like England, Germany or Italy. Let us shrug our shoulders and leave to the enlightened Americans the task of educating their compatriots.

I do not believe much in the accepted hierarchal distinction between critics and creators in literature; it is hard for me to think that Taine was less creative than his contemporary in time, Octave Feuillet, or, if you wish to rise to the heights, that Aristotle was less creative than his contemporary in space, Shakespeare.

When a man needs metaphysics, he soon comes to need religion. Metaphysics are the first step in the mystic stairway.

The man of nature is the slave of nature, but above all the serf of custom. Liberty increases with civilisation, and there is no true liberty except in an extreme civilisation.

I agree that Romanticism has corrupted men's minds, but we have to explain how at the same time it renewed so powerfully the sources of literary sensibility, how it created a new beauty.

. . . Sainte-Beuve, that exasperatingly reasonable man, that excessively prudent judge, that cunning Atheist, that shamefaced materialist, that prudish immoralist.

The people will always be with those who promise happiness, against those who demonstrate that happiness is a dream.

From *La Maison de Sylvie* (Théophile) to the *Jeune Captive* (Chénier) French poetry was dramatic, satirical, precious, burlesque, eloquent, witty, and even tender, though not often; but it was not lyric.

Boileau thought that French literature only began with Malherbe; the professors who sneered at Romanticism thought that French society only lost its virginity with the death of the great king.

The Americans, who do everything on a big scale, have fabricated a colossal prudery for themselves, a thirty-story prudery like their houses, and they are now wondering whether they ought not to forbid all "yellow books", that is, all French literature.

If the *Index* had been taken seriously in France there would be no French literature, for it is almost all on the *Index,* from Rabelais and Montaigne to Michelet and Zola. There would be no French philosophy either, for Descartes is on the *Index* as well as the harmless Victor Cousin.

PHILOSOPHICAL EXCURSIONS THIRD SERIES

[PROMENADES PHILOSOPHIQUES: 3EME SERIE]

1909

CHRISTIANITY is a religion like the others, neither newer nor more worn. It contains no dogma, no rite which is not to be found with an analogous or different spirit in some other more ancient or contemporary religion. Its triumph was not due to its philosophical or moral superiority. The causes of its success were wholly political. Constantine long hesitated between Mithra, a very popular god at that time, and Jesus, not then universally esteemed. Renan saw this very well; the world nearly became Mithraic or Mithraist, instead of becoming Christian. Moreover the two religions greatly

resembled each other. Tertullian was so much disturbed by this that he attributed it to the artifices of the devil. Mithraism indeed included baptism, communion and fasts; Mithra, like Jesus, was the mediator between God and men, whose salvation he assured by a sacrifice; Tertullian gives the name of sacraments to the different rites of Mithraic initiation, among which he was especially scandalized by the rite of the consecreation of bread and wine. The Mithraists had a moral imperative, just like Christian morality, and they believed in a future life, in paradise. The two religions, therefore, must have a common source, but it is not precisely known. They are related to one of the old religions of Asia whose essential characters were sacrifice and communion. It may also be pointed out that the ancient or primitive religions, in so far as we know them, almost always included the sacrifice of the god, his being put to death and the communion meal of the faithful with the divine body represented symbolically or even really if the god of the tribe is an animal. The rites of sacrifice and communion, the very bases of Christianity have therefore an assured filiation. As to the origin of this practice, it must be sought for in magic. By eating an animal, a hero or a god, the qualities of the victim are appropriated.

* * *

It is very imprudent and also very impudent to write about love. If we are not sincere we can say nothing but stupidities, and if we are sincere it is like displaying our physiology naked. A book about love is a book of avowals.

It is a psychological confession and a medical report. And this seems to me all the truer since we never write about love when in a state of perfect health. To do so, we must be sick in body or in sentiment, undergo physical or psychological disturbances. A man who is perfectly healthy, young, strong and joyous, makes love and does not write about love; nor does he read books written about love; the subject interests him as an action and not as a dissertation.

Since Christianity, with the exception of Montaigne, Saint-Evremond and Helvétius, hardly anyone has treated of pleasure except to condemn it, and even the poets who are so abundant and so eloquent about pain, have treated pleasure with a certain contempt. Certainly in the past few years there has been a reaction in favour of life and its blossoming, joy has been sung with a religious, perhaps too religious fervour, but not with such splendour as to send into oblivion the melancholy of Baudelaire or Verlaine. . .

Apart from a few natural commandments, of biological essence, and necessary to the substructure of all society, the old morality is as out-of-date as the old catechism whose younger sister it is. It is no longer a matter of obeying without comprehension a code of arbitrary precepts. It is a matter of being happy, and that is difficult enough to deserve some attention. . .

Since life depends upon them we must despise none of our physiological functions. Breathing, eating, sleeping,

are indispensable actions in which we sometimes take pleasure when they are carried out under favourable conditions. But it is not very pleasant to breath in the bottom of a hole, to swallow poor food or to sleep on a bench. A practical philosophy of pleasure would teach us to draw from these humble functions all the satisfaction they may contain. The elementary sensation of life, the simple consciousness of existence—ought not that to be the basis of all pleasure? However, we scarcely ever feel it except by contrast, after an illness or a danger. There is the subject for a new branch of education, but to have a pleasant sentiment of life, a good bodily equilibrium is necessary. We then come back to the precept of Epicurus, moderation. Naked existence is a happiness for the Neapolitan because, being infinitely idle, he is infinitely sober. Labour engenders needs which corrupt the health. The labourer often buys rather dearly the right to eat, and especially to drink. His true vital interest would be to work little in order to need only moderate feeding, in order to wear his organism less, in order to enjoy it with more moderation, and, consequently, with more consciousness. A disordered activity is perhaps even more reprehensible than idleness for the generality of men. But our sort of civilisation does not allow us to seek happiness in the moderation of the ancients, and these ideas are premature. . .

The senses, properly so-called, are equally far from giving us all the pleasures we should obtain from them. The eye? Who knows how to see and who knows how really

to enjoy his sight? Hardly anybody, and moreover men, turning in a little circle, like trained horses, gaze always at the same things and end up by no longer even seeing them. The ear? The music which is worth listening to is rare. Almost the only pleasures of the ear are to listen to words, but that is rather a pleasure of sentiment or of the intelligence. In daily life smell is more often offended than flattered. Flowers are fugitive, perfumes dear or mediocre. It is the same with taste. First of all tobacco and alcohol have greatly dulled it for a great number of human beings; and then the foods on which it might be exercised are only truly pleasurable at the time of appetite, which proves that taste by itself is hardly anything or is nothing more than a sleeping sense. It is useless to speak of touch which has never given any but very vague pleasures and only then to a few refined persons, to those with a mania. There remains the genetic sense with which all men are supposed to be equally endowed. But that, I think, is an error. There also is a scale of gradations, since there are chaste and voluptuous men. It may also be added, without, I hope, any wound to modesty, that the ordinary run of men, even the voluptuous, do not draw from it all the pleasure possible. Those who have some knowledge of Japanese morals will understand me.

From all this, it may be deduced that in the matter of pleasure man has especially cultivated artificial pleasure, that which does not result from the elementary exercise of his senses or his physiological functions. The philosophy

of pleasure has yet to be created, but perhaps the science of pleasure must first of all be drawn up.

There is a fall of days, as there is a fall of the leaf. An unknown wind blows from infinity, shakes the trees of the year, and one by one the distracted and yellow days fall down. Where do they go? Where do the distracted and yellow leaves go? Doubtless to the great laboratory, where nature labours at her annual resurrections. They will come back to us just the same and as green in their immutable silhouettes: the poplar leaves which are hearts, the chestnut leaves which are hands, the plane leaves which are tridents, the willow leaves which are lances. But what happens to the days when they fall, distracted and yellow? To what distant, unknown and illusory worlds are they carried for ever? For we never see them again. There come new days, the leafage of the years, unheard-of days, unexpected days, surprising days, days we love and days of which we are afraid; but the old days, the days which were familiar to us, which we should desire, which we expect, will never come again. The year's leafage will be renewed so well that we shall recognise in it nothing at all.

Yes, they are days. They have a beginning and an end, they have light and shadow, they are born of the night and die in the night. Assuredly, they are days, but not the same days. Their smiles are different and so are their grimaces. The joys they give us are distributed with no less avarice, but they have neither the same perfume nor

the same colour. Do not hope to find again the smile which enchanted you. It is dead. It will return no more to the face you love, no more than the day on which you were born will return. But at least you can hope to see that face you love still the same? Alas! Perhaps you will have the illusion, but it will not be true, for when the days vanish into the night they carry with them something of men's faces as a memory. Perhaps with those little fragments of faces they mould new and fresh ones far off in those illusory worlds, but this is not very certain.

No, never the same thing, never. Slowly or swiftly an unwearying movement sweeps everything away in a farandole whose two ends never meet. The year is departing; still one day! The day is departing; still one hour! The hour is departing; still one minute! Useless. But perhaps it will all come back again? I have already told you it will not, why insist? Yield to fate.

The Greek philosopher said that we never cross the same stream twice, and if this is a source of bitterness for some, others will see in it a reason for hope. They are those whose memories are chiefly composed of evil days. Let them be at peace. They too will not see the same days. Tears flow and laughter ripples to the very rhythm of life only to plunge together into the endless gulf.

Nothing returns, nothing begins again; it is never the same thing, and yet it always seems the same thing. The reason is that those days do not return, every minute new beings arise whose function it will be in the course of their

lives to create for themselves the same illusions which have accompanied and sometimes illuminated our own. The fabric is eternal; eternal the embroidery. A universe dies when we die; another is born when a new being comes into the world with a new sensibility. Though it is very true, then, that nothing begins again, it is also very true to say that everything continues. We shall assert one or the other without fear, according to whether we are considering the individual or the interlinked generations. From this last point of view everything co-exists at the same time; the same cause produces contradictory and yet logical effects. All colours and all their gradations are printed with a single motion of the press to form the marvellous picture which is called life.

And there is neither beginning nor end, neither past nor future, there is only a present at once stable and fugitive, at once multiple and absolute.

It is the vital ocean in which we all participate according to our strength, our needs, or our desires. Then what matters what we call the fall of the days or the fall of the leaf?

Neither leaves nor days fall at the same time for all men, and the hour which marks the end of one year is also the hour which marks the birth of another.

So in these last December days I dream of life, which is nothing since it ceaselessly dies, and which is everything, since it is ceaselessly reborn. It is the drop of water which runs away at the same time as it falls, but which is followed

and urged on in its fall by another drop. We are that, nothing but that, drops which are formed, fall, run away; and yet in such brief moments we have the time to create a world and to live it. This is the nobility and the mystery of human life, that it is so small a thing and also that it is capable of such great things, for the humblest is very important, it is one of the atoms without which the mass would have neither its weight nor its form. It has its share in a universal movement; it is one of the elements of its equilibrium and its periodicity.

Everyone then must love his life, even when it is not very pleasant, for it is unique. It is a property which will never return and which every man must husband and which he should enjoy carefully; it is a small or large capital which cannot be invested in perpetuity like arrears payable during eternity. Life is an annuity, nothing is more certain. So all efforts are respectable which tend to ameliorate this perishable possession which, at the fall of every day, loses something of its value. Eternity, by which the simple minded are still gulled, is not situated beyond life but in life itself, and is shared among all men, among all living beings. Each of us owns a very little piece of it, but a piece so precious that it suffices to enrich the poorest. Let us bite confidently this white or black bread, and when the fall of the days seems to grow faster let us remember that twilights are also dawns.

Lamarck gives us this lesson, that is there is no philoso-

phy without a scientific basis, neither is there any science without philosophy.

* * *

The young man asks for everything; that is why he obtains almost nothing. But yet it may be said that if the young man's impatience is fatal to him, it is on the contrary good for society which it shakes out of apathy. It is the disappointed young people who, in despair, make revolutions; now, revolutions are essentially favourable to the maintenance of vital energy which they prevent from growing atrophied, while the conservative spirit leads inevitably to paralysis and death.

* * *

To know what everybody knows is knowing nothing. Knowledge begins where what everyone does not know begins. True science is also situated beyond science.

* * *

Posterity is a schoolboy who is made to learn by heart a hundred lines. He learns ten, stammers a few syllables of the remainder; the ten lines are fame, the rest is literary history.

* * *

Athletics make beautiful men—prize fighters, for instance.

* * *

Tradition? Certainly, tradition. But do you not think there is a beginning to everything, even to tradition?

* * *

Civilisation is the cultivation of everything which Chris-

tianity calls vice, frivolity, pleasures, games, temporal business and things, this world's goods, etc.

An imbecile is never bored; he contemplates himself.

Women carry hypocrisy so far that all women can say of their mothers with conviction: "She was a saint."

You have doubts? About what, whom? About God? But it is quite simple, write to him. "I do not know his address." That indeed is the state of the question.

Social revolutionaries make me think of a man whose piano is out of tune, who says: "Let us destroy this piano and throw the pieces into the fire, and then we will install an aeolian harp."

Modesty is a timid confession of pride.

Sick men are always optimists. Perhaps optimism itself is a disease.

La Rochefoucauld makes men more cunning than they are. He placed his wit at the service of humanity.

The altruist is an unreasonable egotist; he wants to model all men on his own sensibility.

Not only is the soul not immortal, but it is the only thing which is mortal. A man dies; the elements of his body survive and are transformed, his mind disappears.

DIALOGUES OF AMATEURS SECOND SERIES

[DIALOGUES DES AMATEURS: 2EME SERIE]

1910

I ALSO love beauty. Rouveyre, who is an artist, loves beauty perhaps even more than we do. That has not prevented him —which is very fortunate, because there is a lesson in it—from decomposing the immutable lines of beauty to show us what movements go to make immobility. In that he is a severe, even a satirical critic. To ordinary people he will appear satirical, although his ambition is quite different from the ambition of a caricaturist. He does not want to make us laugh.

Speed is not an end but a means. I appreciate speed even in modest and disagreeable motor-buses, because it

saves me a few minutes during the day and we never have enough minutes; if I had nothing to do, I should greatly prefer a slower but more comfortable system. I can hardly understand the people of leisure who want super-express trains to carry them from one station hotel to another. I cannot understand them at all when, free to wander, to linger and observe the life of men and of nature, they rush along at top speed, with their nostrils full of dust and their eyes blocked up with black glasses. Ah! They cannot say with Stendhal: "The landscapes were like a violin-bow playing upon my soul." To travel and see nothing. Automobilism has brought people down to that. It makes one feel pitiful and a little ashamed. The motor-car will be the engine which brings man back inevitably to his state of a primate shaken by a perpetual necessity for agitation. Then they could turn round and round like steam merry-go-rounds or dervishes? Are there not motor courses? Speed is an animal pleasure. Foals at liberty gallop about madly, but the purpose is not wholly physiological. Automobilism has not even the merit of being a muscular exercise. It is hardly a game. It is only a mania.

Yes, I dare to say that good pornography delights me, the pornography of the Bible, of Aristophanes, of Martial and of all those solid Romans who denounced debauchery with marvellous precision, and our own pornography, the pornography which amused the Middle Ages, that of Rabelais and of Ronsard, that of which Henri IV complained

he was not given enough, the eloquent pornography of the President Maynard which leads the bacchic procession of the great period, and all that follows down to our last great writers who were persecuted, as is fitting, by middle-class law. I also like Italian pornography with its beautiful style and noble realism, and the Spanish whose expression touches mysticism, and the Venitian whose raving Petrarch was Baffo. Pornography holds a large place in all literatures, and I even wonder whether a writer in whom one does not notice a little pornography is a true writer.

I think the manual labourers and employees and all men who want to work less and earn more are very wise. It is logical, it holds together. They think of themselves, they confess the most enlightened egotism, the most human, the most worthy. But for a gentleman to come along and pretend he is going to make the whole human race happy makes me suspect stupidity or hypocrisy at once. Collectivism? Metaphysical nonsense. Mutual interests—that can be measured, that is comprehensible.

To turn away from a pleasure, a real pleasure, from motives of morality, virtue, good behaviour—what silliness!

A peasant woman in the local costume never makes one laugh. Give her two thousand francs to dress fashionably in Paris, and you will see what a caricature!

Well, once more I realise the value of travelling, even for a very short time—to taste the joy of returning, to find myself as I was before I left, to imagine I have not moved, that I have persisted in living like a tree in the same place in the human forest.

Notice, that I am anti-militarist in my sentiments, but I cannot be so in my reason.

From the point of view of human happiness, which is my point of view, the future of aeroplanes seems to me entirely insignificant.

I am an egotist, therefore pacific.

As soon as a man, whoever he may be, is in the hands of a judge, I feel as if I were the unhappy man's brother.

Is there a science, and not even a science, a positive piece of knowledge which can be conciliated with the religious idea? Is there even a fact into which it can be logically inserted? Try to find a place for Providence in the Messina earthquake, in our common accidents, in our daily life. Try, while remaining logical, to discover an historical event or a laboratory fact where the intervention of God can be seen.

There will never be any good government but the government which discovers the art of leaving people alone.

The game of simulating a sentiment is very difficult and very rare.

In our civilisations, where we are always running after each other, who will give us the right to solitude?

Life is everything while it lasts and nothing when it is over.

LITERARY EXCURSIONS
FOURTH SERIES

[PROMENADES LITTERAIRES: 4IEME SERIE]

1912

I HAD remained very much outside the movement outlined by my contemporaries, living solitary in non-literary quarters, knowing only the names sometimes brought to me by an echo, reading only books, until one afternoon in the galleries of the Odéon I began to turn over the pages of *La Vogue,* the first number of which had just appeared. As I read I felt an aesthetic thrill and that exquisite impression of novelty which has so much charm for youth. It seems to me that I dreamed even more than I read. The Luxembourg was rosy with early April, and I went through it into the rue d'Assas, thinking much more of the new literature which for me coincided

with the re-birth of things than of the business which brought me to that part of Paris. What I had written hitherto suddenly inspired me with a profound disgust. I thought bitterly of the little paper to which as an innocent Baudelairean I had sent verses from a provincial college, and told myself that if I had persevered I might have written for one of these touching little reviews and have participated directly in the joys I had just caught a glimpse of. I succeeded in doing so, for in less than an hour my literary orientation was radically modified, and four years later I published *Théodat* in *La Revue Indépendante*.

After the distress and hesitation of his evil years, Villiers was to become the restorer of literary idealism, as Chateaubriand had been the restorer of literary idealism, the one deriving from Hegel and the other from Jean Jacques. It is not my intention to estimate here the absolute value of these two "restorations". It is enough to point out that if the one delivered us from the petty literature of the eighteenth century, the other greatly contributed towards purging us from Naturalism. And just as it was possible to be a Romantic without taking any part in Catholicism, so it was equally possible to be a Symboliste without sharing in the religious idealism from which it was derived; but it was good to have bathed in the lotus-flower lake; for my part I shall never regret it. To tell the truth, the philosophical education of some of us had already been achieved by the *Schopenhauer* of M. Bourdeau and of M. Ribot. We

had already discovered with intoxication both that the world was evil and that it only existed relative to ourselves.

"The universe is my representation", the formula had penetrated every brain into which anything penetrates, even Huysmans's, who was strangely rebellious to abstract ideas and who was the first to understand *Vera,* one of the *Contes Cruels,* the most startling working-out of that philosophical aphorism.

How did Louis Ménard get the idea of melting pyroxyline or gun-cotton in a mixture of ether and alcohol? Whether the operation was fanciful or methodical, it resulted in a new product, collodion, without which the destiny of photography would have been very different. It was not bad for a romantic Hellenist. The Academy of Sciences acknowledged the discovery, but the inventor himself appears not to have realised it, which was perhaps fortunate for everybody, for in Ménard chemistry would only have gained a chemist without vocation, and Hellenism would have lost its most ingenious interpreter. Since he had neglected or disdained to take out the necessary patents, collodion would naturally have become public property if, in the next year, an American student had not rediscovered the formula, perhaps in the reports of the Academy of Sciences. Now this American, who was probably more artful than Ménard, was himself called Maynard, so that after having lost all the profit of his discovery he even lost the glory of it, since most Encyclopaedists, de-

ceived by the improbability, for more than half a century have unhesitatingly refused the paternity of collodion to "the mystic pagan".

For at least ten years Flaubert, like so many others, was unseasonably and immoderately fertile. His curiosity was directed on every side at once and he was subject to every influence, even that of his surroundings at Rouen, which were not the best of them and from which he soon escaped, a fact which Rouen has only recently forgiven him. I think Flaubert's greatest effort was to tame this juvenile fertility, to sacrifice the numerous plans which enchanted his imagination for a single work. He chose the most difficult, but also the richest in ideas, in images and contrasts, the *Tentation* which was to remain the fundamental work of his life and for thirty years to occupy all the hours he did not give to other works. The true and successful fertility of Flaubert therefore dates from the moment when he had the courage of sacrifice. But what recompenses! *Madame Bovary,* which sealed the tomb of Romanticism as *Don Quixote* had buried the romances of chivalry; *Salambo,* so prodigiously imaginative; *L'Education Sentimentale,* the melancholy and veiled story of the first disillusions life brought him; and then *Bouvard et Pécuchet,* a work beyond which there is nothing, a unique work, without visible style, without imagination, without decoration of any sort, a work stripped of everything which makes a novel attractive, which nevertheless is the most moving of novels.

Flaubert must not be reproached for the discouragement of his heroes, the disappointments from which they all inevitably suffer. His ironical pessimism does not divert us either from life or from action. Only, he warns men that however beautiful their desires may be, they are almost always unrealisable and that this precisely is their beauty. But by a supreme irony Flaubert's life refuted this bitter philosophy better than any work. He had a purpose and fulfilled it completely. His pride dreamed of being a great writer, and he died famous, and since his death his fame has only increased and grown livelier. Flaubert's fame is solid. It stands up out of reach even of stupidity, for the fools who should deny it would do homage to the greatest discoverer of human stupidity since Molière. Some people delight in M. Homais; for my part I also like the priest, Bournisien, the man with the "opaque laugh", whose stupidity is so profound and so ecclesiastical. But all Flaubert's types must be studied; it would be very amusing but very long. Nothing would better show the prodigious fertility of this great poet, who at the same time was a great comic writer.

The ancients committed suicide to avoid a greater evil. They committed suicide to avoid pain, old age, every sort of decay, in order not to outlive their political ideals, their social dignity. In all Greek or Roman history there is not a single suicide whose cause is the impossibility of finding happiness.

That cause of suicide is of modern origin. During the

last centuries men have made themselves so many promises which they were impotent to fulfil! They have ended up by giving themselves such a false notion of happiness! The happiness which the ancients sought in equilibrium, in conformity to natural laws, must not be confused with the happiness placed by philosophical dreams in the eternal and the infinite. That happiness is never fulfilled, but men never consent to deprive themselves of that illusory hope. Moreover at a certain moment they applied it to earthly life itself and demanded it immediately. The result of this was that hope soon changed into despair; for life does not fulfil dreams; it contains nothing but positive things.

These rather severe remarks, I feel, are equally vain, but I could not avoid them, for I naturally love to seek for causes. It would have been simpler to keep to the general opinion that suicide is a disease bound up with the nervous constitution of living beings. Are there not some who believe they have observed suicides among animals? For my part, I do not believe in them, for suicide implies the knowledge of death, and no animal has that knowledge. Moreover, we are here discussing the romantic suicide. Shall we accuse decent animals of romanticism, of a wild search for happiness, of despair? I therefore maintain my first explanation. Suicide, which prevailed so greatly during the romantic period, is the characteristic of men who are demoralised by ill-comprehended Christian promises, who ask too much of life and, receiving no reply, smash their heads against the wall.

Jean de Meung, like many other poets of the same period, has a completely realistic and even pagan conception of existence; they are far less shackled by moral subtleties than we are. Like their readers, who welcomed their stories with real delight, they wished above everything else to live and to enjoy life. Among all their fictions, which seem to us a little puerile, their purpose is to show the means of doing this, which is to yield delicately to one's passions. They are duped neither by men's honesty nor by women's chastity, and they never speak of virtue without a certain smile which says more than their words. I scarcely think they were religious, especially Jean de Meung. In any case religion is wholly exterior to them, does not penetrate their souls, which remain free, and they observe things and men with clear-sighted eyes. M. A. Lefranc is not far from seeing in the *Roman de la Rose* a modern mind, wholly freed from the prejudices of the time. But in that case must we not deliver the same judgment on the public which received that poem with an enthusiasm which did not flag during two centuries? And must we not admit that our conception of the middle ages is strangely erroneous? One of the merits of books which were widely read is that they give us exact information about the state of mind of their admirers. The *Roman de la Rose* is one of them. It tells us at least that in the time of its vogue there was a large party of free minds, in love with life and beauty. And this party began to be so strong that the theologians brutally attacked it.

I am told he was a schoolmaster, and I can easily believe it from the lack of fundamental culture displayed in his writings.

Not long ago I re-read *La Maison Tellier* and my impression was that it is Molière over again.

There are few immortal ideas even among the stupidest.

The history of men is often only that of the women they have loved; but as they are not always admissible, they are passed over in silence whenever possible, because of the good morals which must dominate in the teaching of literary history.

Discipline, which is necessary in any army, becomes universal when the army is the whole nation obeying one man.

To-day there is a group of young men who, from hatred of romantic liberties, from hatred of reverie, love and life, want to bring us back to the dreary practices of middle class reasonableness, and, as they find it clearly expressed in the epistles of Boileau, they hold up that mediocre poet for our admiration.

EPILOGUES: FOURTH SERIES

[EPILOGUES: 4IEME SERIE]

1913

THE other week I re-read Genesis in M. Ledrain's translation and was very much impressed by it. The first books are indeed (how clever the Pope is!) something resembling God's memoirs. Like Caesar, God speaks of himself in the third person, but no man of good will has ever been deceived by it. Only God in his commentaries could permit himself such divine contradictions. A human author would have placed a little order in these confused (like life) stories which continually recommence and never end. He would have unified his hero's name, while God, with the easy carelessness of one who feels himself above every law, gives himself different names in different chapters; here he is Jehovah, and there

he is Elohim. Another strange thing—sometimes he presents himself as a single God; sometimes he admits there are several Gods, and that he represents them. O Lord, your Bible is a very curious book, but you jest rather cruelly at us! And then this code of divine morality shocks human modesty. Among civilised people it is not customary for a man to speak in precise terms of his beloved's sexual organs. Generally he says: "Your heart! Give me your heart!" And she replies: "My soul, my heart, all is yours!" That is sufficient, they understand each other perfectly, although in the resulting operation there is no question of heart or of soul or of any metaphor. Lord, I cannot transcribe here the word you make use of in your voluptuous Song of Songs to exalt the secret beauties of your favourite spouse. St. Jerome recoiled from the image which you evoke with divine daring. Instead of . . . . , the worthy man modestly wrote "navel", which cuts short every curiosity, since the word is without issue. Your theologians have decided that in this exciting poem you meant to sing, not the perishable beauties of some pretty Bedouin girl, but the immortal beauties of your holy Church and the perpetual marriage it mystically celebrates with you. Then why speak of its . . . . ? Has the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church a . . . . "like a cup that lacketh not liquor"? I should never have thought so and for me to believe it needs your authority and that of M. Ledrain. These are great authorities, especially yours, since they have been newly certified by the reigning Pope.

But since you, O Lord, dictated the Song of Songs, how does it happen that your priests forbid us to put into practice its voluptuous morality? There again is a contradiction which rather baffles us. Can it be that your priests have not understood you? Yet they are so intelligent! Since there is a disagreement, allow me, who am only one of the profane, to accept the agreeable meaning of your poem. I should prefer the carnal glory you sing to be a human truth rather than a theological metaphor. But, brother of Zeus, how we recognise your divinity in this! How much you belong to the family of him who loved the daughters of men so much and begat so many children on them! Leda's swan, Mary's dove! Can it be that you are also the author of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*? But the Bible is sufficient for God's reputation. It was an Encyclopaedia and is still one of the most amusing miscellanies to turn over. Nowhere else is the naïve pride of men more extensively displayed. The Jews were truly representative of that state of mind which makes humanity consider itself as a supernatural world, the contemptuous adjective of natural being reserved for the remainder of creation. Centuries had to pass before a few men, a little less mad than the others, came to suppose that between the animal world and the human world there are perhaps some analogies of structure, sensibility and even reasoning. Epicurus certainly had that notion, but it fell into discredit with the Epicureans themselves, and very soon the Jew idea of a Jew god, the father and preserver of the Jews, conquered the world.

These obstinate Bedouins succeeded in making Jehovah adored by the greater part of the civilised world, and by imposing on it their strangest belief, Providence. Judeo-Christian ideas have done much less harm under their religious than their philosophical form; so, to return to the new Syllabus, we should warmly thank the Pope for having widened the gulf which separates philosophy from religion.

I like the cinematograph. It satisfies my curiosity. With its help I go round the world and stop at Tokyo or Singapore as I choose. I follow the wildest itineraries. I go to New York, which is not beautiful, by way of Suez, which is scarcely more so, and at the same hour I wander through the forests of Canada and the mountains of Scotland; I ascend the Nile as far as Khartoum and, a moment afterwards, I gaze at the dreary expanse of the ocean from the bridge of a transatlantic liner.

Is this portion of cinematographic spectacles the most appreciated? I do not know at all, but I do not think so. It seems to me that the average public taste goes to fantastic, comical or dramatic scenes, mimed before the camera. They are fairy scenes, ballets, transformations, apparitions, sudden changes obtained by tricks whose secret I cannot guess; there is an element in them which particularly belongs to the cinematograph, the fairy-tale with living personages is much less subtle, the transformation scene lacks the gradations which may be obtained by a sort of fusion of images, by a very special iridescence of colours. . .

The scenes of private life arranged for the cinematograph, both comic and tragic, absorb the public interest. Their principal merit is clarity. They are always simple, with an elementary plot. What saves them from complete banality is the framework in which they evolve; and also the rapid change of scene. A mimed story which lasts ten minutes is displayed in twenty different surroundings. If there is a pursuit, and there often is, various landcapes are unrolled. I have watched a scene of this kind which showed us the whole of a small district of Spain. The rapidity of the movements increases the impression of life. This is sometimes very intense and we forget the vulgarity of the story in our amusement at its details. It was very curious at Rouen to hear the Saturday night public applauding the actions of illusory characters, lavishing on them counsels of prudence, and hooting the villain. They would almost have thrown pieces of sugar to the good faithful dogs which so frequently play a sympathetic part in these innocent diversions. Such is the power of illusion that a photograph thrown on a screen can move our passions, just as well as reality.

The cinematograph has a morality. It is intensely moral. The firm of Pathé, which provides a large number of these films, allows no liberties to be taken with good principles. With them we are certain that virtue will be always rewarded, crime punished, lovers reunited and duly married, faithless husbands carefully beaten by outraged wives. The cinematograph is a popular and family af-

fair. It has a tendency to be educative. It will get over that, or at least we shall no doubt be offered scenes a little more elevated in addition to these which are too much given to current morality. Many tales of Merimée and Maupassant would make mimed spectacles of great intensity. Several of Shakespeare's plays would also furnish very captivating scenes. These transpositions are proposed without remorse, for they would not touch the work itself; they would respect the spoken word.

The spoken word is what the stage least respects. And so one of the charms of the cinematograph is that nobody speaks. The ear is not distressed. The characters keep their customary stupidities to themselves. It is a great relief. The mute stage is the ideal distraction, the best repose; images pass by, carried along by a light music. One has not even the troubles of dreaming.

At last we have seen Roosevelt close at hand. This intense man is a paltry fellow. We have seen Gerard, who killed lions, Bombonnel, who killed panthers, Sergeant Hoff, who killed Prussians, and Galliffet, who killed Frenchmen. We know all about killers. We also know all about bores.

We also know all about impudence. None the less we enjoy this praise of disinterestedness and civic virtue, at two dollars a word, from the representative of a nation whose political morals are the most corrupt in the world. This will make a change in us. Our custom is to boast of the

vices we do not possess. Perhaps for the first time it must be confessed, we have allowed the praise of Methodist science to be delivered before us. It is not the word we use. Let us also admit that it was all recited with an air of candour and naïveté which our most Protestant pastors do not succeed in feigning in their most unctuous sermons. And with it all, is he a good fellow? He seems to be; "he has his conscience with him!" Ah! if M. Doumer had been born in the United States what a Roosevelt he would have been! Here, people are too shrewd. But the man from America was suspicious. The prudence of the Red-Skin inspired him with a few fine phrases of scorn for intelligence, the critical spirit, the spirit of Satan. "First become barbarians or idiots," he seemed to say, "and you will be on a level with me, you will understand me as well as I understand myself." Was that very prudent at the Sorbonne? The tactics of the far west are not those of Paris. . .

According to his more enlightened compatriots, no one is less of a Republican than this flatterer of the Republican citizens. . . But this is of little interest to us, and Roosevelt seemed to us chiefly a pretentious chatterbox . . . the gods preserve us from these people with moral ideals; usually they are dangerous rogues.

Recently, in connection with the death of William James, I have reflected a little on philosophy, and I have discovered that the influence of philosophers may be summarised

in a few words. I think that every philosophy which is not purely scientific, that is to say negative of metaphysics, ends up by reinforcing Christianity in whatever form is dominant in the different nations. Most people who think they take an interest in what they call the great problems are moved by an interested and entirely egoistic concern. They think of themselves, of their own destiny; they hope to find rationally some solution agreeable to their desires, which secretly conform to the first education they receive. Now, since all metaphysical reasonings are very obscure or at least not very accessible to most minds, when they are confronted with religious beliefs it is found that these beliefs belong to the same order and are clearer, since they have been known for a longer time. This phenomenon occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Deism of Jean Jacques Rousseau, which seemed so distant from Catholicism, prepared the ground for a renewal of Catholicism. Chateaubriand, soaked in Rousseau, was the first of this kind; when "the altars where re-erected," millions of unbelievers, impregnated with sentimental Deism, quite naturally entered them without even noticing it. William James, whose religiosity was indifferent to religious forms, laboured similarly for the sects without knowing it. M. Bergson's spiral spiritualism, with its scientific but deceitful appearances, has the same result. The metaphysical mists he handles so eloquently dissolve in religious rain, and when that rain dries it leaves a sort of manna on which belief feeds. There are more priests than free-minded

thinkers at M. Bergson's courses. His manner of stating free will takes on in France, a Catholic country, an apologetic value. The most illustrious of our metaphysicians should know what he is doing.

The gift of delicacy in love, for it is a gift which no one by definition could acquire, is received from heaven, that is to say from nature, and it is made use of either as a talisman to acquire love or as an evil herb to create self-suffering. Let us put aside those who exploit this divine virtue for their own egotism; the profit they draw from it destroys their merit. It is true they give much, but they give in order to receive; they are not usurers, they are honest bankers who, lending at a reasonable interest, do good business.

Love is subject to common laws. To give without receiving is to go poor, is to vow oneself to ruin. As we give the alms of ourselves with one hand, we must receive with the other the change of a heart as alms. Yet there is a supreme art; that is when we voluntarily give more than we can receive; or at least when we wish to give more; it is when we forget ourselves to watch over the pleasure of the being we adore; it is also and specially when this effort is common to both parties, but then, what a recompense! Devotion to love is so highly paid that the whole of life, during a few divine moments, seems a small thing in comparison with such moments.

But all this is not yet true delicacy in love. To be true, it must be hidden, it must advance veiled and discreet, al-

most timid, uneasy, offering itself not as a mistress, but as a slave who knows his value and that of his heart.

Love is physical; but what is the worth of physical love by itself? A great deal. But the other love, tenderness, gives it a hundred, a thousand times greater expansive value. The love of delicacy, the love which is ready even for self-sacrifice becomes, if it can be satisfied, a source of such pleasure that it turns the head. These lovers said: we are intoxicated! A real intoxication, but different from the other; for the one is unconscious and the other, on the contrary, exalts to the point of enchantment the joy of living, the joy of having sacrificed one's strength for the affirmation of life and the conquest of pleasure.

Delicacy enjoys love and warms itself with pleasure; it desires pleasure, but does not wish it separated from the pleasure of the person it gazes at and whom it loves. To receive is delicious for it; to give is divine. It needs a mirror; it contemplates eyes which become as gentle as the eyes of a little child, all this body which becomes as slender as that of a little sleeping girl carried to her cradle by her mother; in its hands it feels the quivering of this singing body, every nerve of which is a violin string; it melts in the final softening when it seems that the flesh is nothing but a soft ripe fruit visited and caressed by bees.

During a century people have laboured to identify two states which yet have very few relations, the state of love and the state of marriage. This is quite new in the history

of morals. The ancients never thought of it; nor the moderns either. To permit such an association of ideas we had to have the Christian Renaissance which characterized this century, so famous for its incoherences. This allows us to parody a little Pascal's saying about justice and force. The moralists, not being able to conquer love or to make it Christian, placed it in marriage where they were certain it would be dishonoured and even assassinated. Certainly, it would be more convenient and even perhaps more agreeable to find love in marriage rather than to seek it in the chances along the paths of life, but if it is ever met with there, it remains only for a short time and leaves very much disappointed those who have been caught in such a snare.

Love is transitory and marriage is permanent. The sentiment and the institution are almost contradictory. Moreover, love is only delicious in its beginnings, or else the genius of loving is needed in order constantly to renew its fervour. Sometimes lovers find this will in themselves, they desire this grace so much that they receive it, but married people, confident in their security, think that it is one of the consequences of marriage and are greatly astonished to see it escape them. Face to face they grow weary of gazing at eyes which speak no more, and mouths without kisses. Love does not last, it is renewed. Now, marriage is opposed to this renewal. Therefore love and marriage are incompatible. . .

After the first looks, the more or less disguised avowals, the slight contacts, the lovers inevitably seek to satisfy the

desire of mutual pleasure which cries out in them. And "the limit of love" is reached. Nature asks no more, nor does Don Juan who scrupulously obeys it. But Don Juan is a little narrow-minded. This man, who has tasted so many women, has perhaps enjoyed none of them. At bottom he is a fool. He has known many women. He has not known the woman, who never gives herself at first. Imagine a book-lover walking through a library who stretched out his hand here and there, opened a book, returned it, and went on his way always repeating the same action and pretending that he had read, dreamed, and meditated! That is Don Juan, the amateur of women. Don Juanism is only a series of rapes, more or less consented to. This is not how a lover behaves. The person who gives him pleasure is also the person who gives him happiness and he knows that happiness is not exhausted as a glass of wine is emptied. He wishes to dismember the soul and body of the woman he has conquered, to learn to read in those changing eyes half-closed by dreaming and enlarged by pleasure.

The legislator is an unconscious tyrant who thinks he has done his duty when he has satisfied his prejudices.

The hatred of liberty now exalts as many minds as, at certain periods, the love of liberty. Strange reversal.

It is regrettable that physical love in all its attitudes is not more studied by artists. Like the physiologists, they

should throw off all stupid prudery and frankly treat this noble phase of human life. There is scarcely anything beautiful of this sort except a few antique bronzes and Michael Angelo's Leda.

I admit it is with the dead that I like to struggle and combat. I want Voltaire to be read so that there may still be people to judge whether I have sometimes approached him. That would greatly flatter me. I want people to read everything that is beautiful, witty, curious, touching, rare, profound. . . I want a line in the volumes where French genius is discussed.

Life is not only a brutal fact, it is also and perhaps chiefly an ideal fact. It is not so much a matter of being rich or happy as of believing one is going to be rich or happy.

No consideration will prevent me from writing what I think or will make me write what I do not think.

Better, I think, be nothing, than become too late what one has dreamed of too long.

We must lodge contradictory ideas in the hotel of our brain, and possess enough disinterested intelligence, enough ironic force to impose peace on them.

The more our present differs from our past, the more

our life is multiplied. Ah! to change, change for ever, and always remember.

The revenge of free minds is that the most fervent adorers of the old moral idol at certain moments feel the need to come and breathe a little pure air near them, as whales from time to time rise to the surface of the sea.

The search for causes, which has created the sciences, has also arranged religions, magic, the thousand sacred stupidities by which so many men among us still live.

LITERARY EXCURSIONS
FIFTH SERIES

[PROMENADES LITTERAIRES: 5IEME SERIE]

1913

WHAT makes the public suspicious of literary studies on the middle ages is above all the apparatus of erudition with which they are surrounded. It seems as if no poem or novel of that period can be presented or explained to the reader unless it is enveloped in notes and learned researches, the first result of which is to discourage all elementary curiosity. Specialists write for specialists and never abandon the scientific tone. Yet I believe that literary matter belongs to anyone who thinks himself sufficiently endowed with taste and sensibility to judge its form and to appreciate its beauty, that a certain ignorance of erudite details does not harm but rather aids

the novelty and ingenuousness of criticism, and that the way to see a question and to see it well is perhaps to observe it from a certain height and at a certain distance. For my part, and I confess it without shame and even with a certain candour, I have scarcely ever written on a subject which I was not at the same time discovering. How boring to write about what one knows only too well! While to disentangle your ideas while you express them gives at least the joys of discovery in default of creation.

Our life, which has no morrows which can be foreseen, is only a series of discontinuous moments where the future only depends upon the past to the extent that we do not change; but we do change. The friendships, loves, curiosities which we scatter disdainfully along our path, sometimes despite ourselves would remind us of this if we could still perceive them in the past such as we felt them in their novelty. We change to an extent which makes one seriously doubt the unity of human consciousness; like the hydra it has several successive heads which hand on a password, sometimes half understood, sometimes not understood at all. From this observation one derives a great sadness but also, when the situation is accepted, a certain amount of comfort; it is then possible to contradict oneself with perfect calmness.

The romance literature of the Goncourts is the repetition of anecdotes from daily life. Everything which happened

under their eyes, everything which was heard by their ears, is grouped in their novels according to a logic ill-determined by the nature of the characters. They often invent these characters solely to impose upon them a group of picturesque anecdotes. Thus, what is true in their novels is not the figures themselves, but their actions; not their thoughts, but their words; not their personalities, but the exterior and non-essential things life brings them. Everything, nearly everything strange and startling which happens in *La Faustine* is to be found in the *Journal* in the form of true anecdotes. They were never able to see that the facts must flow from a type and not the type from facts. In a historical novel of the Revolution they would have grouped about an imaginary character everything that was born from a Marat or a Robespierre, without understanding that, when the real characters are taken away, no doubt something would have happened, but not the same things. They did not see that man creates life in his image and that what happens to a given person would not happen to another person, because under the same experience their reactions would have been different. Old Goncourt even more than the two Goncourts practised the independence of the man and the human anecdote; that is what is called the literature of the document. It includes no romance. The very anecdotes which have such an appearance of frankness and freedom in the *Journal* take on a curiously awkward and forced air when fitted into their novels. They are true in the daily jottings of the note-book but become false in

stories where they are attributed to characters to whom they did not happen, so that they throw discredit both on the *Journal*, which acquires a fantastic air, and on the novels which acquire an excessive air of systematic realism. But it is precisely that which gave their novels in their flower that tone of realistic picturesqueness which seduced the best minds and afterwards dominated a large public. The faults of these books have only recently appeared, as their mechanism was better understood. Perhaps to judge them we should put on one side our knowledge of a method which has only become too visible through the fault of the authors, who boasted of it too much. If they had not disclosed their sources so frankly, they would pass as worse historians but better novelists. To push this further would be starting an inquiry into realism and naturalism, which are only a confusion of historical methods applied to the novel, history being extended to anecdotes, to the description of environment, human manias, the whole social scene; and I have no desire to do this, because after all works dominate theories and in art we should know how to enjoy even those which are contrary to our own tendencies but not to art itself.

The books of the Baconians and M. Demblon's book are a proof that people cannot understand that literary genius may be incarnated in a man who in all simplicity gives himself up to the occupation into which he has fallen, but who carries it out uncommonly well, whose pleasures

are unobtrusive and whose pains are interior, who envies none because his imagination possesses everything, for whom life is only an extent of time which love affairs and the tavern fail to fill, to whom chance reveals the magnificent possibilities of a mind he had never thought of questioning directly, who one day grows tired of organising the vanity of dreams and goes off to die in the place where he was born. Yet such is the story of Shakespeare; it is marvellous and even more touching than his plays of life and dreams. We must add to it a touch which increases its naïvely human aspect, which is that the fruits of his mind were comparatively profitable, that his patrimony was reestablished and that this was the real cause of the return of this nostalgic peasant to his fields. His life is admirable from its simplicity. It is so free from the very appearance of anything theatrical or of the charlatan, it is so gently in conformity with necessity and order, so exemplary indeed, that it must appear insufficient to a man as consciously romantic as Coleridge, as firmly convinced as M. Demblon and most of our contemporaries that there must be a logical relation between things and human beings.

There is a strange relation between pure Parnassian poetry and the didactic poetry of the First Empire.

I do not utter judgments, I note the impressions of my successive readings, corroborated or contradicted by the

most recent, and I am only careful to communicate them to the best of my ability as I feel them.

Whether you feel life to be fundamentally good or bad, or, more reasonably, a mingling of good and bad in different proportions, the truly philosophical tendency is to accept and, in the common phrase, make the best out of it.

Every great mind naturally has its philosophy, but must not try to systematize it too much.

All styles, when they are original, can be criticised. After all, no writer (even if he is not a writer) likes any style but his own, because he only really sympathises with the movement of his own thought, of which style is the form. The criticism of style would suffice as literary criticism; it contains all the others.

LITERARY EXCURSIONS SEVENTH SERIES

[PROMENADES LITTERAIRES: 7IEME SERIE]

1927

THE great mass of people is becoming less and less interested in literature. Almost all the newspapers founded with a literary formula have given up short stories and criticism. At one time *L'Echo de Paris* published in its first column poems by M. de Régnier and M. Vielé-Griffin; those days seem to belong to the old regime. All the literary supplements have disappeared and those which persist incline towards illustrations, curiosity, history. Here is not the place to complain of such a change; it has made the fortunes of the reviews which evolved at the right time and, while keeping their dignity and even their disdain, little by little

threw off their too esoteric tendencies. But the reviews do not publish half a million copies. A great morning paper with a circulation of about that number undertook an inquiry into the present state of French literature, at the end of the summer, at a moment of repose and political calm. It fell absolutely flat; the public, knowing nothing about the subject except the names of a few dramatic authors, did not understand it at all, and this must have appeared to readers like the stories which the newspapers are accustomed to relate, in exchange for various fees, about pink pills and Belgian cough lotions. By annexing new millions of readers to the reading of daily news items and current politics, the great popular newspaper has only annexed uneducated persons. But these uneducated persons are the majority and make the law. It is they who, by their ignorance and their vulgarity, have exiled from the press everything which is thought, art, an aesthetic and disinterested game. There are still a few little workshops to be seen; they date from a distant past, they are tolerated and they will disappear with those who inhabit them.

For a long time it was one of the originalities of France that its newspapers were a mouthpiece for literature and philosophy as well as for politics. Taine and Renan wrote for the newspapers, at the same time as Goncourt, Maupassant, Villiers, Daudet. A considerable portion of the *Trophées* appeared serially in a great newspaper where M. Anatole France conducted around new books his irony

embroidered with erudition—or the contrary. Now fine pages of style and thought are infinitely rare in the press. Is that to say that the source has dried up and that through lack of masters we have had to resign ourselves to disciples and understudies? No one will say so, except those whose interest it is to justify their negligence or to flatter the intellectual meanness of the public. At least one branch of higher French culture is in a dazzling state, scientific speculation. No place has been given it by the successors of those who in their time welcomed the fashionable philosophy. They failed to see that a world of ideas has arisen, stifling under its movement the last sigh of M. Renan's nostalgic reveries.

The physicist and the biologist are often as ignorant of philosophy, art and literature, as a land-surveyor or a writing master may be; and the critic, the novelist and the philosopher pass judgment on life, its passions and the causes of passions while ignoring all the light which would be given them by physiology, biology and medicine. The occasional attempts at synthesis which have been made are not welcomed; the way is not prepared; nothing is achieved but obscure mixtures. If a playwright, trying to astonish the Boulevard by his darings brings a man of science on the stage, he is made to utter absurdities and is shown looking for the microbe of love! This would make one angry if it did not happen in the lower world of sentimental farce.

Science and its methods have in general no influence on

belief and ways of thinking. The continued weakening of intelligences finds therein no source of strength, no reinvigoration. Yet France is less affected than any country in the world. It may still observe with a certain amount of complaisance the intellectual subsidence to which the Anglo-Saxon world has been reduced by the taste for religious nonsense. These nations with their great physical activity are perhaps on the way towards reducing themselves to the mechanical condition of ants and bees. The intelligence is there concentrated on a few practical points; everything which is disinterested escapes it. Hence an absence of culture which places them at the mercy of every religious imposture. Messiahs, prophets, mystic healers, raisers of the dead, swarm in these environments which are lacking in the critical sense.

In spite of counter assertions, in spite of boastings, owing to the universal care which is taken to teach little things to a multitude of little minds, it seems that the fashion and the tendency are towards ignorance and stupidity. . . The time is perhaps not far distant when everything above the level of a primary school will be considered pretentious or senseless.

It may be said generally that, apart from politics and anecdotes, average humanity is interested in nothing, except comfort.

Mechanics are a petty thing. Humanity has been made

what it is by the passion for science, for the arts, for literature. The possession of a railway, even an electric one, does not raise the mentality of a negro people. All the nobility of mankind lies in the attention of which it is capable in order to maintain the decoration of thought and beauty, which is the whole of civilisation.

Scepticism is not indifference; on the contrary. It is passion contained and properly directed, the passion which can distinguish the essential from the transitory in life, which laughs appropriately and shrugs its shoulders at the right moment.

[END OF VOLUME II]

Translator's Note: Although this book was devised for Americans, the English spellings and phraseology native to the translator have been retained. This not in any insular spirit, but because it would be an impertinent affectation to adopt the American forms of speech which are not common to both countries. But, in a work of rare literature, this difference will perhaps be thought unimportant. Six thousand miles separate translator and publisher; trivial errors, if they exist, find their excuse in that; serious errors are mine.

R. A.